



"Independent Eritrea"

A crumbling nation and a tragedy

**Ghirmay Yeibio,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.
January 2013**

Part 2

The Beginning

The bible is not only a spiritual book but also a book of wisdom. I would like to begin Part 2 of my article "Independent Eritrea" - A crumbling nation and a tragedy, with a quotation from the good book.

"A wise man built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But a foolish man built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash". Matthew 7:24 - 27

24 May 1991, ushered in a new era in the history of Eritrea. It was a culmination of a 30 years armed struggle and another 20 years of political turmoil before it. The Eritrean people's aspiration and struggle for nation hood was concluded in the creation of a sovereign Eritrea. The era of nation building started.

What type of house did Eritreans start to build? On what foundation was the house built? Is Eritrea built on sand, and heading towards destruction ? When you start from the wrong premise, it is obvious that you would end up at the wrong conclusion. What was the premise from which we started this long and arduous struggle ? Was it the right premise? Was all the sacrifice and carnage worth it ?

The premise that Eritrea was annexed and colonized by Ethiopia is highly contentious. Colonialism involves; geographic occupation, socio-economic domination, transfer of population to a new territory as permanent settlers, the subjugation of one people by another, outright enslavement, forced assimilation, exploitation of cheap labor, economic exploitation of natural resources, and creation of new markets for the colonizing nation. Did the above happen to Eritrea when it was part of Ethiopia ? These are serious questions that need to be addressed.

Eritrea and Eritreans are in a far worse situation than when they started the revolution. They have fallen under the yoke of a new breed of home grown brutes, who not only have denied their very unique and proud identity as Abyssinians and Africans, but also created a jilted "hybrid identity" which is alien to the centuries old history and heritage of the people and the land.

Half a century later this new nation finds itself profusely bleeding and depleted of its people; particularly the young. This new nation has began to disintegrate and come apart at its seams. Is it because Eritrea was built on sand? If this trend continues it would not be long before "it falls with a great crash" and becomes history.

These days, many ex fighters and insiders of the Asmara regime have begun speaking up, and are telling horrendous tales of crimes committed by the Eritrean fronts. Apart from telling us about the crimes, they have not told us what the root cause of the problem is which enabled such crimes to be committed.

The problem that Eritrea faces today has its roots in the very beginning of the struggle for independence. The Eritrean people never really owned the Revolution. The wishes and opinions of the people were not taken into consideration nor did the welfare and interest of the people given precedence.

It was imposed on them by exiled activists and students of Eritrean extraction living in Cairo. These exiles were adherents of the Pan-Arabism school of thought and were supported by the Arab world. They espoused Pan-Arabism; an ideology celebrating the glories of Arab civilization, espousing the language and literature of the Arabs, and calling for rejuvenation and political union in the Arab world. The front they formed (ELF) believed that Eritrea is part of the Arab world with common linguistic, cultural, religious, and historical heritage. ¹

These forefathers appear not to have understood who the people of Eritrea are. They denied the centuries old history and connection of the land and people, and tried to impose their version of what Eritrea should be, by conspiring with foreign leaders who had ulterior motives. They never tried to understand or consult their own people.

These exiles, decided to start an armed struggle in 1960 in Cairo to re-create a new Eritrea. They were such a bunch of spineless cowards that none of them wanted to take up arms and launch the armed struggle themselves. From their respective comfortable abode in Egypt and Sudan, they entrusted the all important military wing to an outlaw "Shifta" named Hamid Idris Awate, who already had a small band of outlaws (Shifta) at his disposal, and was engaged in cattle rustling, plunder and highway robbery in the Western Lowlands of Eritrea.

In an interview with Omar Jaber, Mohammed Ali Idris a.k.a. Abu Rijela (1944 - 2010), one of the Disciples of Hamid Idris Awate, and one of the earliest military leaders of the ELF, credited with leading the Battle of Togoruba in 1964; had this to say about himself. *"I was born near Agordat and joined the Sudanese army in April 1944 at the age of 17. I did not know the difference between Eritrea and the Sudan till 1956 when the Sudan became an independent republic. Abu Shanab, Mohammed Ali Tinay, and myself discussed about divorcing our wives and go to fight the Ethiopians. We joined Awate's unit of 20 fighters in [the spring of] 1962."* ² These were the leaders of the revolution and so called "forefathers", who did not even know who they are let alone understand the problems of Eritrea and the Eritrean people.

Yet later these "founding fathers" and the ELF were replaced by a new breed of revolutionaries - the EPLF. In the 'dog eat dog' world of both fronts, finally a victor emerged; the notorious dictator of all times, Isayas Afewerki. In an interview with Mark Corcoran of the ABC in May of 2004 he had this to say:-

"For me retirement means retiring from what you do in life from what you aspire to achieve in life in a nation and I don't think that will ever cross my mind again any time in the future as long as I am alive." ³ Well, Isayas is implementing what he "aspired to achieve in life"; the destruction of Eritrean history, identity and its people, and create a new Eritrea.

Tragically, these are the people who led the 30 years of liberation struggle, they never had the interest of the people at heart at all, except for themselves. It is my contention that the Eritrean people never owned the revolution, and they were just used as Cannon fodder both by the former as well as the latter leaders of the fronts.

Mark Corcoran concluded his article, *Eritrea - Death of an African Dream*, by saying this. *"This is Asmara's other war memorial known locally as 'The Tank Cemetery'. A vast resting place for the wreckage of four decades of conflict. Many now fear this is how the great Eritrean dream will all end.* What a prophesy; and that was said in 2004. The writing is on the wall.

Tragically enough Eritreans in the opposition camp, be them the old guard or the new youth organizations, seem apparently unable to identify the source of the problem and diagnose it accordingly.

What is ailing Eritrea? Wherein lies the origin and genesis of the problem of this nation and people? How could we be able to avert total catastrophe before it is too late? All this needs to be thoroughly examined and defined. Then and only then can we begin to right the wrong and bring peace and prosperity to the people of Eritrea. The people of Eritrea have been abused and brutalized by their own children for far too long. Time and time again they have been asked to pay enormous sacrifices in their life, in the life of their children, and their property for over 50 years.

Eritrea was part of the ancient kingdom of Axum. The port city of Adulis of the Axumite Empire is located in present day Eritrea. Most of Eritrea with much of Northern Ethiopia was the nucleus of the Empire. Named by Emperor Zara Yacob (1399–1468) as the domain of the Bahre Negash and Midri Bahri, and renamed Mereb Melash by Emperor Yohannes IV (1872 – 1889), it was administered as an integral part of Ethiopia by its own Prince known as the "Bahre Negash" or "King of the sea coast" who was a vassal of the Abyssinian King. Ethiopian emperors kept their presence at the red sea until the mid-16th century. Part of its coastal areas adjoining the Red sea, and part of the Western peripheries were occupied by the Ottoman Turks and Egypt at different times.

The colonization of today's Eritrea by Italy was done in a creeping fashion. In 1869 an Italian Catholic priest named Giuseppe Sapeto acting on behalf of Rubatino (a Genovese shipping company) signed a contract with the Afar Sultan of Ausa in a ship called Nasrel al-Majid to purchase a piece of land at Assab for 8,100 Maria Teresa.

Assab was chosen by the Italians for its strategic location near Djibouti and the Straits of Bab el Mendeb. The reason for the purchase was to capitalize on the anticipated increase in trade as a result of that year's opening of the Suez Canal which was set to transform the Red Sea into a vital access route linking Europe with the markets of the Far East. Italy felt it could not stand idly by as its rivals scrambled to establish landing stations and trading posts along the waterway.⁴

Over the next twenty years, the Italian colonialists moved northward on the Red Sea shore and expanded their territory up to Massawa. After Ethiopia's Emperor Yohannes IV was killed in March 1889, the Italians moved into the northern plateau and established the colony of Eritrea, named after Mare Erythraeum - Latin for "Eritrean Sea", in 1890.

As Trevaskis puts it, "Italy created Eritrea by an act of Surgery; by severing it's different peoples from those with whom their past had been linked and by grafting the amputated remnants to each other under the title of Eritrea".⁵

Furthermore, Ferdinando Martini the governor of Eritrea from 1897 to 1907 spoke of the colonisation of Eritrea in his own words by saying "We have invaded Abyssinia without provocation, violently and unjustly".⁶ It is worth noting here that Martini acknowledges the new colony "Eritrea" as part and parcel of Abyssinia.

Michaela Wrong in her book *I did not do it for you* also states that; "They(the Italians) had come to the Horn with plans and beliefs – that Africa was an unclaimed continent, their own not only for the taking, "but for the carving up" and sharing out amongst friends. It was an assumption that held true nowhere in Africa, but least of all when applied to what was then known as Abyssinia, the ancient Ethiopian empire that lay hidden in the Horn's hinterland, beyond a wall of mountain".⁷ Again Michela also tells us Eritrea is part of Abyssinia.

After being severed from the rest of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Eritreans began to evolve in a different direction from the rest of Ethiopia. The exposure to western civilization and the infusion of capital by the Italians, stimulated the economy. Industrialization and small scale commercial farming was introduced, resulting in the creation of a new class of wage laborers, industrial workers and urban dwellers. In a way this benefited Eritreans in the sense that it created a class of Eritreans who were comparatively more skilled than their Ethiopian brothers.

While the majority of Ethiopians remained under a feudal system, Eritrean society changed to a partially industrialized society. It also brought about the integration and restructuring of the Eritrean society. This in turn contributed to the creation of an Eritrean consciousness or identity to a certain degree.

Furthermore, In Italian East Africa (*Africa Orientale Italiana*) which was established in 1936, resulting from the merger of Ethiopia, Italian Somaliland and Eritrea; the Italians, "In recognition of both past and future contribution of Eritreans, passed a decree in 1937 distinguishing the Eritreans from other subjects of the newly founded empire in East Africa. The Eritreans were henceforth to be addressed as "Eritreans" and not as "natives", as was the case with the rest. Furthermore, priority was to be given to Eritreans in certain categories of jobs and professions".⁸

Nevertheless, this attempt by Italy "to give Eritreans a new and different identity", did not take hold in the psychic of the majority of Eritreans. Eritreans believed that they were Ethiopians despite their separation from Ethiopia. Eritrean *Ascaris* who were forcibly recruited by Italy and used in the war, demonstrated their sympathy and allegiance to Ethiopia by deserting and joining the anti-colonial resistance movement. Thousands of Eritreans joined the resistance movement (*known as Arbegnoch*) against Italian colonialists, and fought alongside their brothers during the second Italo-Abyssinian war.

As a matter of fact, Emperor Haile Selassie not only recognized these ex *Ascaris* who defected to the Ethiopian side, but also as a reward for the loyalty and service of these outstanding Eritrean patriots (*which were also known as Sime'ter Hamassien*)⁹, He rewarded them farm land each a "*Gasha Meriet*" (*approximately 40 Hectares*), in the vicinity of the town of Shashemene, in what was then known as the province of Sidamo.

Temesgen Gebeyehu on his work about land measurement in Shashemene explains that, "There was also land grant to the "renowned Hamasiens (Eritreans)" in Shashemene. There were two rationales for the eligibility of Hamasiens (Eritreans) for land grant. First, there were Eritreans (Hamasiens) who came to Ethiopia opposing the colonization of Eritrea in 1890. Second, during the 1935 - 1936, Italo-Ethiopian war and period of resistance, a large number of Eritreans deserted the Italians and joined the Ethiopians. Accordingly, there was land grant to them or their families in the Shashemene Woreda".¹⁰

Some of the individuals who heroically defended Ethiopia and laid their precious life resisting Italian colonization, and are honored and revered in Ethiopian history as national heroes, are Eritreans. Most prominent amongst them are:-

1. Zeray Deres (from Hamassien)- the lion of Rome, a young Eritrean who is lionized to this day as a brave Ethiopian patriot with unparalleled bravery and patriotism. When in Rome on June 14, 1938 saw to his shock the golden Lion of Judah, the symbol of the ancient monarchy of his ancestors erected as war booty in the heart of Rome, Zeray knelt down in front of the monument to pay homage. When an Italian army officer attempted to prevent him from continuing his devotions, he drew his sword with rage and with tears of anger running down his face, screamed "Long live Emperor Haile Selassie, Long live the Lion of Judah, down with Italy, down with the King of Italy and down with Mussolini!" and attacked the Italian Officer. He killed and wounded numerous other officers before he was shot and wounded in the Piazza Esedra, and fell near the Statue of the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.¹¹
2. Two young Eritreans Abrham Debotch (from Serayie), and Mogos Asgodom (from Akeleguzay), made a daring assassination attempt and wounded the Fascist Italian Viceroy Marshall Rodolfo Graziani on 19 February 1937 in Addis Ababa by throwing 7 hand grenades and killed 3 Italian Officers and wounded 52 others including General Liotta, Commander of the Italian Air force who lost his right eye and a leg as a result of the attack. The attack by Abrha Debotch and Mogos Asgodom in the heart of the invaders gave the patriots a moral boost and the retaliatory action taken by the Italians following the attack further widened the existing gap between the Ethiopian people and the Italian Occupiers.¹²

3. Colonel Belay Haileab, who was the Black Lion resistance group commander during the second Italo Abyssinian war and whose monument still stands at Holeta Genet Military Academy. He and his group conducted military campaigns in Western Ethiopia, in the vicinity of Lekemte, Wollega. Colonel Belay Haileab was later captured and killed by Italians. ¹³

Even at the conclusion of the second Italo-Abyssinian war, no retaliation was taken by Emperor Haile Selassie on Eritrean *Ascaris* who fought alongside Rome till the end.

Furthermore, during the Italian occupation of Eritrea many Eritreans fleeing discrimination and segregation moved to Ethiopia in search of work and education and were welcomed not as aliens but as Ethiopians. They were not treated any differently than Ethiopians and many benefited from the educational and work opportunities available at that time in Ethiopia.



One of the many Eritreans who migrated to Ethiopia during the Italian occupation of Eritrea was Blaten Geta Lorenzo Taezaz. Lorenzo Taezaz born on 30 June, 1900 in Adi Keyih, Akeleguzay district of Eritrea, frustrated by the humiliation and racial discrimination in the hands of Italians and a bleak future in his homeland, left for Ethiopia in 1925 after completing the 4th grade education given by Italians in Eritrea. ¹⁴

Upon arrival in Ethiopia Lorenzo was welcomed as an Ethiopian with full citizenship rights and was sent by Emperor Haile Selassie to the University of Montpellier in France on a government Scholarship, where he studied Law and Philosophy.

Upon his return he was appointed as the Minister of Justice (1933), Ethiopia's Permanent Delegate to the League of Nation (1936), Foreign Minister of Ethiopia (1941-43), Minister for Posts, Telephones and Telegrams (1943) President of the Chamber of Deputies (1943-1944), and later as Ambassador of Ethiopia to the Soviet Union (1944 -1946).

Lorenzo was a diplomat par excellence, a veteran of the second Italo-Abyssinian war, a true genius, and an exceptional person in many aspects. Blaten Geta Lorenzo Taezaz died in a hospital in Stockholm, Sweden in 1946 and was buried in Addis Ababa with full honors at the grounds of Holy Trinity Cathedral reserved for the royal family of Ethiopia and high ranking officials. A Street in Addis Ababa another street in Asmara and a Junior Secondary School in his birth place Adi Keyih were named after Lorenzo Taezaz. I wonder if the street in Asmara and the School in Adi Keyih are still named after him. The street in Addis Ababa is still called "Lorenzo Taezaz Menged" (Lorenzo Taezaz Street).

Other notables who were high ranking officials in the Ethiopian government at that time were Blaten Geta Ephrem Tekle Medhin first Ethiopian Representative to the UN, Blata Dawit Ogbazghi vice mayor of Addis Ababa, Brigadier General Mebrahtu Fisseha, General in the Ethiopian Army, father of Martha Mebrahtu heroine of the Ethiopian Student movement etc., etc., the list is very long.

Many other Eritreans lived and prospered with full citizenship rights in Ethiopia and others were educated and promoted to higher offices in Ethiopian government and army by the Emperor while Eritrea was still occupied by Italy. By the mid 1940s there were tens of thousands of Eritreans living in Ethiopia. These Eritreans later played a very decisive role in the reunification of Ethiopia and Eritrea in the 1940s and 1950s.

Eritreans considered themselves as Ethiopians and Ethiopia accepted Eritreans as Ethiopians. It was a mutual recognition by both sides of the intertwined relationship, common history, shared culture, same identity, interdependent economy and inseparable destiny between them and nothing else.

Therefore, the effect of Italian colonialism on the majority of Eritreans regarding their identity as distinct and different from that of Ethiopia by and large was minimum. The only divergence that was created as a result of Italian colonialism is that Eritreans became more skilled than their Ethiopian brothers, and they inherited a network of roads, rail, industries, modern agricultural farms, infrastructure and a modern city with Mediterranean flavor - the beautiful Asmara. They were a war booty for the Eritrean people.

Even though the seed of separate Eritrean identity was planted during the Era of Italian Colonialism, only a select few Elites identified themselves as Eritreans. Eritreans rather identified themselves by their respective ethnic group or clan as *Hamassienay*, *Akeleguzetay*, *Serewetay*, *Tigretay*, *Beniameray*, *Jeberti*, *Bilenay* etc., ¹⁵

Some also identified themselves collectively as *Habesha* ¹⁶ (Abyssinian), as coined in the song of the famous Eritrean folk singer *Ateweberhan Segid (1917 - 84) "Nea Gereb Tehisha, Wedi Habeshayie, Gereb Tehisha"*.¹⁷ Take note that Ateweberhan did not say "*Nea Gereb Tehisha, Wodi Eritreayie Gereb Tehisha*". For the majority of the people of Eritrea the designation "Eritrean" was alien and used only by very few elites. It began to be used more frequently to describe identity from the 1970s onwards.

Although Italian colonialism unified Eritrea geographically and set in motion economic; social and cultural changes, by and large the effect of Italian colonialism in creating "Eritrean consciousness" as different from that of "Ethiopian consciousness" was minimal at best. The Eritrean people also did not launch any meaningful or strong opposition as "Eritreans" during the 50 years of Italian occupation. In fact Eritrean opposition to Italian Colonialism was manifested by the flight of many Eritreans to Ethiopia and joining the Ethiopian resistance movement, which was simply an affirmation of their Ethiopian Identity and consciousness. Half a century of forced separation did not erode the Ethiopian Identity of Eritreans.

After Italy, Germany and Japan signed the tripartite pact in September of 1940, which became known as the Axis alliance; Italian East Africa including Eritrea became a target for the Allied forces. In 1941 the British forces moved from the Sudan into Western Eritrea, and after a bloody battle for the strategic town of Keren, which was concluded in the defeat of Italy on 18 March 1941, Asmara the Capital fell in the hands of the British on 1 April 1941. This was the end of Italian occupation of Eritrea. Thus Eritrea entered a new phase in its history - The British Administration 1941 - 1952.

It was this period which was rather more important to what ensued in the last 70 years of Eritrean history. Eritreans have been deprived of political participation during the fifty years of Italian rule, as a result there was no organized political party or activity in Eritrea. The British began implementing some changes in Eritrea which included the establishment and implementation of a new educational system, freedom of speech, assembly and organising, and permitted political activity.

Taking advantage of the new liberal attitude of the British, political parties and labour unions were formed and newspapers flourished giving the Eritrean political life vibrancy. Debates regarding the future of Eritrea ensued by the Eritrean elites.

As a result several parties with differing programs were formed by various groups, the most important ones being: 1) The Unionist Parties (Mahber Fikrehager), 2) The Moslem League of Eritrea (Al Rabita Al Islamiya), 3) The Liberal progressive party (Eritrea N'Ertrawian), and 4) The Pro Italia party (*Partito Eritrea Pro Italia*).

The Unionist Party was formed as early as May 5, 1941 and coincided with the return of Emperor Haile Selassie to Ethiopia from exile. As T. Negash explains it:- While the Emperor raised the Ethiopian flag in Addis Ababa, the people of Asmara held a demonstration calling for the unification of Eritrea with its motherland Ethiopia. On the same day, the leaders of the conference announced the formation of the Unionist Party - an organization that was to play a very important role in the fate of Eritrea. Both the demonstration and the formation of the Unionist Party were of a very local nature. ¹⁸

The Unionist Party was the dominant party in Eritrea, and derived its support from different Ethnic and religious groups. For the Unionist Party whose slogan was Ethiopia or Death (Ethiopia woyim mott), union with Ethiopia was simply the recognition of the fact that Eritreans are Ethiopians; no more and no less. The Unionist party believed that whatever problem the Union might entail, it is to be viewed and dealt with in the framework of a united Ethiopia along with other Ethiopians.

The Unionist party was well organized, purpose driven and believed that Eritreans would stand to gain by the complete and unconditional union of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Compared to the other parties, the Unionist Party enjoyed the largest support of the Eritrean people. Both Eritrean heads of State during the federal Era, namely Tedla Bairu and Asfaha Woldemichael, were elected from the Unionist Party which affirms its dominance in the Eritrean parliament.

During the Federation, the Unionist Party began to implement its agenda by methodically dismantling the federal structure. The assembly removed the national flag of Eritrea; changed the title of the Government to "Administration"; changed the seal of the government; and made Amharic the medium of education. The Unionists encountered only limited resistance when passing these legislations in the Eritrean Assembly. There was nothing stopping the unionist party from implementing its agenda.

The federal arrangement which was viewed by many observers as a compromise solution, was imposed on the Eritrean people by the UN, and was grudgingly accepted by the Unionist Party. Nevertheless, the Federation could not have worked between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and was still-born from day one, mainly because the concept of Federation was new and alien both to Ethiopians and Eritreans. It could serve only one purpose, i.e. a stepping stone towards complete union.

The Unionist party was responsible in dismantling the federation through legal means using the Eritrean Assembly. Proponents of Independence contend that the Federation was abolished by Ethiopia and not the Eritrean Assembly, and argue that Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia. Given the political environment in Eritrea at that time, this argument is absolutely baseless and incorrect.

The Moslem league of Eritrea (the second largest party in Eritrea) which was formed in 1947 in Keren, was primarily formed to defend the rights of Eritrean Muslims and present a unified Muslim voice, and called for the independence of Eritrea. The formation of the Muslim league had the hand and encouragement of the British Administration in Eritrea.

According to T. Negash, Brigadier General Benoy encouraged the Muslims of Eritrea to make their voice heard. "General Benoy appeared to have made a strong impression and convinced Eritrean Moslems that unless they are prepared to think for themselves, the Plateau Christians will do the thinking for them".¹⁹

The founding fathers of the Moslem league of Eritrea opposed Union with Ethiopia based on the argument that Ethiopian Muslims were treated badly by the government of the Christian Emperor Haile Selassie, and hence it would be wrong for Eritrea to be united with Ethiopia. They were afraid that Eritrean Muslims would be worse off by unity. They argued that there is no Muslim Minister, parliamentarian or High ranking official in Ethiopia and that there is no organization that defends the rights of Muslims in Ethiopia.²⁰

It was the Muslim League of Eritrea which first adopted Arabic Language as it's official language along with Tigrigna, at its foundation in 1947. Moreover when the federal constitution of Eritrea was being debated, even though the Unionist Party suggested that Tigré and Tigrigna be the official languages of Eritrea, the Muslim league objected and pushed for Arabic and Tigrigna to be the official language of Eritrea.²¹

It is surprising why a party which derives its support mainly from the "Tigré ethnic group" and is led by a prominent Tigré; Sheik Ibrahim Sultan, advocated for Arabic instead of Tigré. Over 80 % of the Eritrean people speak Tigrigna and Tigré (both Semitic languages descendants of Ge'ez) as their native languages. Whereas only about 2.4% speak Arabic. Except the Rashaida, Arabic is spoken only by a few elites.

The Muslims of Eritrea do not know, neither speak Arabic. Arabic is used only for religious rituals by the Muslims the same way Ge'ez is used by the Christians. No Tigré, Saho or Afar uses Arabic in markets, home, social or other gatherings. Neither do they conduct their day to day affairs at village level (bayto Adi) using Arabic. They do not communicate with their children, spouses, friends or relatives using Arabic. Even today, it has no value as a cultural symbol or as an instrument of communication. The selection of Arabic as an official language is not only absurd, but also raises questions on the motives of the leaders of the Moslem League.

History repeated itself again 28 years later after the second organizational conference of the ELF in 1975. Educational books, which were prepared in the Tigré language by teachers at the Sawa training center, were ordered to be burned by the Executive Committee, citing the reason that it was a conspiracy directed against the status and prominence of the Arabic language in Eritrea. The leadership of the ELF gave orders not to prepare any more educational texts in the Tigré language henceforth. ²²

"ኣብ ፕሮግራም ናይቲ ቀዳማይ ጉባኤ፣ ኣብ ሕቶ ቋንቋታት፣ ትግርኛን ዓረብን ወግዓውያን ቋንቋታት ከይነን፣ ናይ ኩለን ቋንቋታት ኤርትራ መሰልን ማዕርነትን ከሕሎ ዝብል ነጥቢ ነይሩ እዩ። እዚ ነጥቢ'ዚ ድሓር ቦቶም ዓቃባውያን ወገናት፣ ከም ኣንጻር ዓረብ ዝቐንጠ ውዲት እዩ ተራእዮ። "እዚኣን ቋንቋታት ኣይኮናን ዲያለክትስ እየን" ዝብል ምጉት ኣምጺኦም። ከም ውጽኢት ናይዚ ኣመለኻኻታ'ዚ፣ ኩሉ ተጋዳላይ ጀብሃ ከምዝከከር፣ ድሕሪ ጊዜ ውድባዊ ጉባኤ፣ ኣብ 1975 ኣብቲ ውድብ ዝነበረ ንመምሃሪ ተባሂሉ ዝተዳለወ ናይ ትግረ መጻሕፍቲ ተቐጺሉ እዩ። ኣብ መዓሰከር ሳዋ ዝነበሩ መምህራን፣ ካልኣይ ቋንቋ ናይ ኤርትራ ትግረ'ዩ ብዝብል ገርሃዊ ኣተሓሳስባ እዮም ብትግረ መምሃሪ መጻሕፍቲ ኣዳልዮም። እዚ ምስተሰምዐ፣ ኣብ ኣኼባ ፈጻሚት ሽማግሌ ጀብሃ "ናይ ትግረ መጻሕፍቲ ክጸሓፍ የብሉን" ዝብል ውሳኔ ሓሊፉ ከምዝቃጸል ተገይሩ። እቲ ውሳኔ ኣብ ገለ መራሕቲ ጀብሃ ዝነበረ ናይ መንነት ቅልውላው ዘንጸባርቑ እዩ ነይሩ።" (http://www.ehrea.org/dont_forget_history_01.pdf)

The program of Al Rabita Al Islamiya also calls for the unification of Sudanese Bejas with Eritrea. ²³ It had a much bigger agenda of unifying the people of the area on the basis of ethnicity, probably to secure more support and counter the Unionist Party. The Muslim League was the precursor to the Eritrean Liberation Front.

Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan, the Leader of the Muslim league, in his speech at the UN meeting in Lake Success in 1949, openly stated that Eritrea is 75% Muslim and the rest are minority ethnic groups, and that the Muslim League would guarantee the rights of these Minorities in independent Eritrea. ²⁴ By one stroke he reduced the Christian people of Akeleguzay, Hamassien, Serayie, Kunama, Bilen and the significant Italian and foreign residents of Eritrea to only 25% and called them a minority.

The Liberal Progressive Party (*Eritrea N'Ertrawian*) was a party formed by Ato Woldeab Woldemariam and Ras Tessema Asmerom who exhibited deep hatred and resentment towards the Shoa led government of Haile Selassie and called for the independence of Eritrea. It also advocated for the formation of a Tigray-Tigrigni State comprising of the Northern Ethiopian province of Tigray and current day Eritrea.

It also advocated for a ten year British trusteeship to be followed by independence for Eritrea. Like the Muslim League, the Liberal Progressive Party of Eritrea had the hands and encouragement of the British in its formation, and it was the party most favoured both by the British and the Four Power Commission for its explicit recognition of the British contributions in Eritrea and for its willingness to entertain a long period of Western trusteeship. ²⁵

The Pro-Italy Party "*Partito Eritrea Pro Italia*" was another smaller party which was formed by Italians, ex Italian Ascaris, and half castes in Eritrea. There were approximately forty thousand Italians living in Eritrea at the time. The party advocated a 15 years return of Eritrea to Italian trusteeship like Somalia, followed by Independence. It was supported and financed by the Italian government. It was a party that advocated for the re-colonization of Eritrea again by Italy.

While the Unionist Party was working to restore the centuries old identity of Eritrea, the other parties led by their respective leaders were trying to create a new identity and writing a new history from scratch; an Eritrea stripped off all its age old history, connection and past. Even though their programs showed that they want the independence of Eritrea as their primary choice, they all had a secondary choice, like trusteeship under the UN or Britain or Italy.

They were willing to be administered by any other nation than be united with Ethiopia. "Anyone but Ethiopia" was their motto. On the contrary "Ethiopia or death" was the motto of the Unionist party.

They impregnated into the minds of the people nationalist militancy without examining whether it is sensible, or beneficial to the people. It was an ideology incapable of bringing lasting peace and prosperity to Eritrea in particular and the Horn of Africa in general. That is one of the reasons why Eritreans find themselves in such a tragic mess today.

*Ghirmay Yeibio
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada
January 2013*

(To be continued in Part three)

Reference:

- ¹ Teklom Nirayo - Don't forget history (Tariq keyresae)
http://www.ehrea.org/dont_forget_history_01.pdf
- ² http://www.harnnet.net/February_2010/In%20Memory%20of%20Abu%20Rijela.pdf
- ³ Mark Corcoran - Eritrea - Death of an African Dream - Broadcast: 25/05/2004 -
<http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2004/s1115678.htm>
- ⁴ Michaela Wrong - I did not do it for you. PP 30 - 31
- ⁵ GKN Trevaskis - A Colony in Transition
- ⁶ Ferdinando Martini as quoted by Michaela Wrong - I did not do it for you pp 45
- ⁷ Michaela Wrong - I did not do it for you pp. 30 - 31
- ⁸ Tekeste Negash - Eritrea and Ethiopia - The Federal Experience PP. 17
- ⁹ Eritreans in general were referred to as "Hamassien" in Ethiopia even though they come from different parts of Eritrea.
- ¹⁰ Temesgen Gebeyehu - A history of land measurement in Shashemene(Ethiopia),1941-74 pp 69 - 70
- ¹¹ London Times - Amok with Sword "ABYSSINIAN SHOT IN ROME" June 15, 1938
<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/81469092>
- ¹² Aregawi Berhe - Revisiting resistance in Italian-occupied Ethiopia: The Patriots' Movement (1936-1941) and the redefinition of post-war Ethiopia PP. 104
- ¹³ Explained to the writer of this article who had the privilege of visiting Holeta Military Academy as a teenager in 1970. For further reading on the Black Lion resistance movement refer Aregawi Berhe - Revisiting resistance in Italian-occupied Ethiopia: The Patriots' Movement (1936-1941) and the redefinition of post-war Ethiopia
- ¹⁴ Daniel Kinde - Lorenzo Tazaz And The Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1941)
<http://www.ethiopianreview.net/index/?p=53119>
- ¹⁵ Names of Tigrigna Speaking Eritrean provinces (Hamassien, Serayie, Akeleguzay), and Ethnic groups and Clans (Bilen, Tigre, Jeberti, Beni- Amer)
- ¹⁶ People referred to as "Habesha" include the Amhara, Adere, Gurage and Tigray ethnic groups of Ethiopia, and the Tigrigna, Tigre and Jeberti of Eritrea who are predominantly Orthodox Christians but some are also Muslims. In the broadest sense, the word Habesha may refer to anyone from Ethiopia or Eritrea. English equivalent of Abyssinia.
- ¹⁷ A song depicting the heroism of Abyssinians by Ateweberhan Segid (a.k.a. Ato Abrha Segid) who was a famous folk singer in Eritrea from the 1950s to the 1970s
- ¹⁸ Tekeste Negash - Eritrea and Ethiopia, The Federal Experience PP. 37
- ¹⁹ Tekeste Negash - Eritrea and Ethiopia, The Federal Experience pp. 44

²⁰ Alemseged Tesfay - Aynifelale pp. 193-194

²¹ Francis B. Nyamnjoh, Harri Englund -

Rights and the Politics of Recognition in Africa pp 222

²² Teklom Nirayo - Don't forget history (Tariq keyresae)

http://www.ehrea.org/dont_forget_history_01.pdf

²³ Alemseged Tesfay - Aynifelale pp. 201-203

²⁴ Alemseged Tesfay - Aynifelale pp 334 - 336

(UN Official Records of the Third Session, First Committee, Document A/C.1/435)

²⁵ Tekeste Negash - Eritrea and Ethiopia, The Federal Experience PP. 47