

INVITED TALK ON THE BATTLE OF ADWA

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to thank the organizers of this centenary celebration for making the celebration possible and for giving me the honor and the opportunity to be here among you to share the pride we derive from the world-famous victory of Adwa.

The right place to celebrate the Adwa centenary is of course Ethiopia. But Ethiopia is off limit **for Ethiopians**. You may ask, how so; since many of you might have visited or could visit that region any time you wanted. My answer is simple: I do not want to go there as a tourist. When I go to Ethiopia, I want to feel that I go home because Ethiopia, where Illubabor is, where Gondar is, where Gojam is, where Kefa is, where Harer is, where Shoa is, where Bale is, where Tigray is, where Wollegga is, where Arsi is, where Gamo Gofa is, where Eritrea is, where Sidamo is, is home. For the TPLF, however, my home is not Ethiopia but my so-called ethnic homeland. But I honestly do not know of any ethnic group to which I should belong. So, to which of the eight or so ethnic homelands, to which Bantustan, or Reservation, or *Killil*, would I go? I am sure that the TPLF, after a superficial interview would assign me a homeland and issue me a pass to go there. This is not an exaggeration or a theory that I need to prove by going there and to see how they classify me. This is already happening to as many people as the government can handle at a time. Teachers are asked to look for their native homeland and go there to apply for teaching jobs. New college graduates are asked to do the same.

Are there Ethiopians in Addis Ababa who are not asked to pack up and go home? Yes, there are: one of them is Ato Meles Zenawi, the architect of the Ethiopian Bantustan. He is there as head of the traffic police and hit squad (the TPLF) which, with their bayonets, show the evacuees the way to their homelands. The others who have not yet been asked to go home will soon have their turn. These people either know the truth and are resigned to the fact that they can do nothing, or believe that the worst is over, that it was a close call when their neighbors were asked to get lost. The truth is they are needed only until substitutes are semi-trained. They, we, as well as whoever cares, have already seen how members of the so-called Council of Representatives of the so-called Transitional Government of Ethiopia were used and thrown out in the rain, how the officials of the Telecommunications were used and then put in jail as a prelude to their dismissal, how the president of Addis Ababa University was used to destroy the lives of his longtime colleagues (his colleagues since the foundation of the University in the early 1960's) and was finally told that he was no longer needed once the mission entrusted to him was successfully accomplished.

Nevertheless, we do not despair. As Emperor Zer'a Ya'iqob (1434-1468) once said, despair is the worst enemy of mankind. Ethiopia is land and people. Wherever we go, we take Ethiopia with us. No one, not even someone with the mightiest power on earth at his disposal, can take Ethiopia out of us. Zera Yerer took it with him to Italy and fought for it in the middle of Rome. Ethiopia was with Abdissa Aga in the jungles of Italy and Yugoslavia when he fought against the Italians with Marshal Tito. Each of us in the diaspora here and elsewhere has taken it to his or her new country. We are now at this moment with Ethiopia, for we hear her say, to borrow from the Bible, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them."

No, today is not the day for despair. Let me tell you what I firmly believe: No one can kill Ethiopia. The only way Ethiopia can die is by committing suicide. Will that happen? You and I have to answer this question, for Ethiopia's suicide will come only through us, her children, if we fight each other. I hope and pray that we will not go on doing that. We have stable and solid communities.

We are the products of a long history and culture that bind us together. The rains may fall, the floods may come and the winds may blow and push that nation, as they have done in the past. In the end, the country .. nation, people and land .. will survive.

Most of you may have heard or read about how Eritrea was a colony of Ethiopia. The latest advocate of this fairy tale is none other than the present Prime Minister of Ethiopia. But his work is only the tip of the ice berg; be prepared to hear more. In this month's (March 1996) issue of the ***Ethiopian Register (EtR)***, Professor Sven Rubenson writes of the appearance of some new Tigrinya-speaking scholars who claim that the battle of Adwa was exclusively an Italo-Tigrean affair, that the Italian army moved south from Eritrea and occupied Makele to unite the Tigrinya speakers under its rule, and never intended to move south beyond Tigray which, at that time, was supposedly an autonomous state. Why then did the Ethiopian army, first led by *Ras* Mekonnen and *Fitawrari* Gebeyyehu and later by Emperor Menelik himself, come to the front line? The answer for these revisionists is the force from the south was **not** the Ethiopian army, which included Tigray. Rather, that army was the army of a neighboring state - "Shoa headed by *Nigus* Menelik." Emperor Menelik and his "Shoan army" supposedly marched north to help Tigray and its ruler, *Ras* Mengesha. When Mengesha won the war, "*Nigus* Menelik and his Shoan army" went back to Shoa. In short, the 1896 war at Adwa was between Tigray and Italy of Eritrea, and the victory was Tigray's. According to this fairy tale, the victory of Adwa should, therefore, be celebrated at Adwa, in Tigray, by the Tigreans, with guests from other countries, including the other *ki/lli/s* or Bantustans of Ethiopia, invited to watch and to applaud as the present-day Tigreans make *shille/a* and *qererto* for their ancestors' victory. For this celebration countless historical artifacts, that is to say the national heritage preserved in the museums and monasteries of the country, have been carried away to Tigray.

In the nineteenth century, European powers were out to grab and colonize any country in their reach. The strength as well as the weakness of their race to colonize was, of course, the competition among them. Though they frequently collaborated in their efforts, as they raced against one another, they were contained by the other. In the countries they did colonize, each worked to make the natives feel inferior by presenting themselves as superior creatures. They valued "the white man's prestige," to be guarded at all costs. **Sir Winston Churchill's** comment on the victory of Adwa is an example: "On the 1st of March, 1896: the Battle of Adwa was fought and Italy, at the hands of Abyssinia, sustained a crushing defeat. Two results followed which affected other nations. First, a great blow had been struck at European prestige in North Africa. Second, the value of Italy as a factor in European politics was depreciated."

Only a nation with pride, a high degree of solidarity among its citizens, and blessed with leaders which used the colonialists' competition against them could hope to resist colonialization. In all of Africa, only one nation, Ethiopia, led by one rare leader, Menelik, was able to remain independent. About Menelik, enough cannot be said. In the years leading to Adwa, Ethiopia had been blessed with brave and religious leaders, such as Tewodros (1855-1868) and Yohannes (1872-1889), but only with one brave, religious and astute politician: Menelik (1889-1913). Swimming in a sea infested with sharks, he came out unscathed and Ethiopia bitten, but not swallowed.

A brief background of events that led to the battle of Adwa is as follows: Italy was able to take Massawa in 1885, and plant herself in the Mereb Millash highlands shortly thereafter, because at that time the central administration lacked adequate intelligence about Egypt and Italy. Without such vital information, the bravery and political wisdom of Emperor Yohannes could not stand up to the treachery of Great Britain, the deep desire of Italy to occupy the Red Sea coast, and the problems created by his struggle for power with Menelik of Shoa and Gobeze of Amhara. Furthermore, one cannot underestimate the extent to which the Napier Expedition (1868) left the impression in the regions it traveled that Europeans were invincible. The sound of Napier's

cannons, the size of his shells and the distance they covered were simply too much for Ethiopian society of that time, Indeed, an Ethiopian chronicler explained his wonder at the size of the shells by noting how the women in the village used them as water jars. In taking Massawa at a time, Italy certainly benefited from that impression.

According to Portal (the British envoy to the court of Yohannes in 1887), when, in 1880's Emperor Yohannes complained to Queen Victoria about the Egyptian occupation of Massawa, "poor Egypt had no army worthy of the name, no officers deserving of confidence, no money, no credit and no men." Had Yohannes known then how weak the colonialists actually were, Ethiopia would not have bothered to complain to a foreign power when the region, including the port, was hers to liberate. In fact, the Italians managed to conquer Massawa with a small contingent because the Egyptians had already abandoned it; they had "no men" there at that time. Let us not forget that Harer was abandoned by Egypt at about the same time.

The tragic story of British treachery is probably well known to most of you. When "poor Egypt had no army worthy of the name, no officers deserving of confidence, no money, no credit and no men," its "protectors", the British, turned to Ethiopia, who had everything Egypt lacked, and used her. Signing a treaty at Adwa in 1884, they asked the Emperor to use his army to facilitate the withdrawal through Ethiopia of the Egyptian colonialist troops besieged by the Sudanese. In return, Ethiopia was promised by the treaty the return of the territories annexed to Sudan and access to the port of Massawa.

Understandably, the Sudanese did not like the deal. They wanted to capture their enemies and confiscate their arms. How was Ethiopia expected to comply with the Adwa Treaty? Eager to have his lost territories back and access to his own port, the Emperor sent troops which fought the Sudanese and rescued the Egyptian troops. We defeated the Sudanese and stationed the Egyptian colonial soldiers at Massawa. The most painful part of the story is that more Ethiopians died in the fight than the Egyptians we rescued. The Egyptians did not bother to fight or even to carry their own baggage. And only a year later, Massawa fell in the hands of the Italians who refused to honor the Adwa Treaty and denied Ethiopia access to the port. All we achieved from the endeavor was Sudanese enmity.

Had the Emperor at least not failed to station an Ethiopian garrison in Metemma (Qallabat) at the time, he would have not died there in 1889. When Massawa became "no king's land" - because the Egyptian troops which the Emperor placed there were forced to return to Egypt because they had no supplies in Massawa. Italy moved in, with a handful of soldiers, in February of 1885. The Emperor, having allowed the opportunity to slip from him, complained again to Queen Victoria, this time for encouraging the Italians (instead of him) to take the abandoned Massawa.

Once the Italians took the port, they started inching into the hinterland. This angered *Ras Alula*; the governor of the region, so he destroyed all who came as far as Oogali (Jan. 1887). But *Ras Alula* was reprimanded by the Emperor, who believed that the Italians would leave his country through peaceful negotiations. I assume you know who *Ras Alula* was. If there is anyone here who does not know of this awe-inspiring general, I recommend that he/she read his obituary in the February 27, 1897 issue of *The New York Times*, or the report by Portal, British Consul-General at Zanzibar, who wrote that Alula, "the owner of that powerful, cruel, and intelligent face would be bound to make his name known in any country, either as a leader or as a destroyer of men." The Consul-General tells us that he "had seen such eyes in the head of a tiger ... and of a leopard, but never in that of human being."

The Dogali incident was followed by the infamous battle of Sahati (March 1887). Sahati could have been used to secure Ethiopia a place in the arena of world powers, had her leaders considered the weather of the lowlands when preparing for the battle. Adwa (1896) and Maichew (1886) would never have taken place. What happened at Sahati, instead, was this:

As soon as the Italians realized they could proceed into the hinterland unchallenged (after Alula's reprimand), they moved inland to Sahati with a force of 20,000 men and built there a fortification impregnable by Ethiopian weaponry. The Emperor, with about 200,000 men, moved to deal with the invaders. He brought his army as far as Sahati.

One of the contingents mustered against Ethiopia, siding with the Italians, was that of *Dejjazmach* Debbeb, a cousin of Emperor Yohannes. According to *Dejjazmach* Dr. Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, the great great grandson of Emperor Yohannes, *Dejjazmach* Debbeb quickly abandoned the Italian cause, calculating "that the balance of power was shifting to the Ethiopians." In his political biography of Emperor Yohannes (Oxford 1975), Dr. Zewde continues: "Debbeb's defection at this time was unfortunate for the Italians, not only because of his strong, well-armed force, but also because he possessed knowledge of the numbers, positions, and plans of the Italian forces and fortifications. Furthermore, if Yohannes chose not to attack, the Italians would be forced by the heat to withdraw within six weeks."

Upon reaching Sahati, what did this massive Ethiopian force do? Seeing that the Italians were well-fortified, the Emperor wrote them a letter "demanding that (they) should return to Massawa ...", with Lij Wossen as a messenger. When they ignored him, he "sent a second letter, asking for an answer to his demand, and thanking (the commander of the invading force) for the warm reception he had accorded his envoy Lij Wossen."

When the Italians ignored him again, he withdrew with his 200,000 men "feeling secure," according to *Oejjazmach* Dr. Zewde, "that there was no serious or immediate threat from the Italians." Well, there was a "serious" and "immediate threat" of lasting consequences: the Italians occupied Asmara and positioned themselves to sustain any attack as soon as the Emperor - because of the bad weather and a shortage of supplies - withdrew and marched to Metemma where the "enemies" were fellow Africans. This is the central story of the loss of northern Ethiopia to the Italians, and the event which led the colonialists to believe they could colonize all of Ethiopia.

Well, on to Adwa, I will leave the details of the battle and victory itself to the other speakers. I will only add a paragraph or two to indicate how vulnerable northern Ethiopia was when Emperor Yohannes fell at Metemma in 1889. It is reported in some sources that as Emperor Yohannes had no heirs - his only child, Prince Araya, having died earlier - he, as Emperor of Ethiopia, and Menelik, as his vassal in Shoa, had agreed that in the event of Yohannes' death, Menelik would succeed him to the throne.

But when Emperor Yohannes fell at the battle of Metemma in 1889, he declared that Mengesha, was his son and his heir to the throne. Until then it was not officially known that the Emperor had a son (other than the deceased Araya), much less one that he would make his heir. Moreover, any objective assessment of the political situation at that time makes clear that the Emperor had loaded Mengesha with a burden which he could never carry. Because the Emperor's army had disintegrated at Metemma, in the far west, while Menelik's massive and well-equipped army was intact, and in the center of the country. And while such internal power struggles ran their course, Italian occupation of the far north became a reality.

One other point about Adwa, the question whether Emperor Menelik could have marched into Asmara after the victory of Adwa to throw the Italians into the sea is frequently asked? Harold Marcus and Tsegaye Tegenu, in the March (1996) issue of *EtR*, and Shumet Sishagne, in the April (1996) issue of the same news magazine, address the question at length. I agree with these authors that Menelik simply did not have the resources to do so. However, it is not clear to me why Emperor Menelik did not at least insist on greater revisions to the Treaty of Wichale (May 1889) at the Addis Ababa (October 1896) convention. Ethiopia won a resounding victory at Adwa, but for

reasons unknown, Emperor Menelik agreed to abide by the additional convention which *Dejjazmach* Mekonnen signed at the ratification ceremony of the original treaty. This convention expanded the colony's borders miles into northern Ethiopia .

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What do we learn from the victory of Adwa? Many things, if we have the humility to learn from history and, if we focus our eyes on the prize: the liberation of Ethiopia from dictatorship and the restoration of our nation's dignity. I do not list some of these many things because you do not know them, but to underscore their importance.

(1) Our solidarity must be tough. The Ethiopians' high level of unity was crucial to the Adwa victory. That same level of unity guaranteed victory in 1941. The old national anthem does not fail to recognize this: "For your patriots (O Ethiopia) have become of one mind" (tebabrewallinna arbenyochisch). It is not in our tradition to abandon our brothers and sisters at the front line. Wherever there is struggle, we have to be of one mind and of one united front. Now is not the time for struggle between parties, especially when the struggle takes place in cities which are not our political fields. Let us today celebrate together Adwa's centenary and the coordination of party activities until we win the field for separate activities.

I mentioned at the outset that Ethiopia will die only by suicide. What I call suicidal is party feuds in the wrong place and at the wrong time. The instant gratification which we derive from "I gave them a piece of my mind" or *likk likkachewin neggerkuwachew* must stop. Who are we fighting, each other or the TPLF/EPLF? What are we fighting for, to bring democracy to our nation or to be the next dictators? I want you to declare truce and pledge and swear in the name of Ethiopia that you struggle for democracy and for Ethiopia's territorial integrity, and that principle will guide your every action. Temporary suspension of separate party activities is not a dissolution of political activity but a coordination and strengthening of such activities.

The foundation for solidarity is acceptance as part of the united front everyone who accepts the group's rules, regardless of their background. Shoa, home to Menelik, is home to many ethnic groups. Emperor Menelik was born to a woman of unknown origin. His grandfather, *Ras Sahle Sillase*, came from Amhara and Oromo ancestors. For the Emperor, his people's background was of absolutely no importance.

The following remark by the historian *A/eqa* Atsme may be of interest to you: "On the day of his coronation, his Majesty gave to the soldiers titles, titles which were instituted (and recorded) in the history of King Suseneyos. For Emperor Suseneyos/Siltan Segged had instituted 35 titles detailing the function and regional administration (for each). Emperor Yohannes, too, had given titles according to this tradition but only to the people of his homeland Tigray. The Emperor (Menelik) on the other hand, bestowed these titles of honor to people who came from other homelands; he did not bestow them on too many people from Shoa."

Menelik's actions seem remarkable only today. But for Menelik and his court, ethnicity was not a thing that wanted much attention. Perhaps that is why so many of us who come from that region - Amhara, Oromo, Gurage, etc. - do not understand the concept of ethnic-based struggles. Class struggles, yes. Gender struggles, yes. Ideological struggles, yes. But ethnicity-based struggles, no.

The idea of self determination in the sense it is understood in Ethiopian politics (based on ethnicity and leading to secession) and used by the TPLF/EPLF does not mix with solidarity and territorial integrity. In theory, and on paper secession could be groups' democratic right, but its implementation can come only by force, which is a violation of groups' and individuals' rights. We are witnessing how the enemy is making it a recipe for national disintegration. That is one of the

major reasons why we oppose the TPLF regime. I urge us all, for the sake of solidarity, at least to make a moratorium on its use until we achieve democracy. That is the only way we can assure Ethiopia that we are no TPLF. Why do ethnic groups which do not want Ethiopia's destruction need a concept that is being used to destroy their Ethiopia? Is it not wise to avoid an unnecessary risk? Here is a lesson we should learn from *Etege* Tayitu. When the Ethiopian politicians at Menelik's palace discovered that article 17 of the Treaty of Wichale had a serious problem, endless amendments were proposed by the signatories to improve it. *Etege* Tayitu's proposal was that since the entire treaty was about commerce and friendship, and since the deletion of this risky article would not affect that purpose, the article should simply be deleted. Of course, *etege's* proposal outraged the Italian representative. Why? Because he had an ulterior motive in wanting to retain it, just as the TPLF/EPLF have one with respect to the principles of self determination. Ethnic groups which want to use as safety net or deterrent against the domination of the major ethnic groups should not be used by those who do not wish Ethiopia well. Let us together seek a device that will give every ethnic group the safety ~ needs but guarantees at the same time against the nation's disintegration.

(2) The opposition needs astute leadership. Emperor Menelik inherited a nation in which Emperor Tewodros had sown the seed of unity but never reaped its fruit, even though he tried ceaselessly for over ten years. Emperor Yohannes, with his religious attitude, was not one who could unite Ethiopia. Emperor Menelik was able to achieve an unprecedented solidarity - using a forceful combination of (more) carrot and (less) stick - within a very short time. He took power of this ethnically diversified nation in 1889 and the Battle of Adwa, at which Ethiopians solidarity was at its best, took place only seven years later.

How did he do it? His biggest assets were foresight and magnanimity. He dared to escape from the Fortress of Meqdela, knowing too well that he could be hurled down the precipice if he were caught; he sought and received help from Queen Worqitu of Wello, knowing that she would risk her son's life (who was in detention in Meqdela) if she let him proceed to Shoa. He came to Shoa with a few escorts knowing that the principality was in the hand of Ato Bezzabbih and his army. His general, *Ras Gobena Dache*, who won the south for the Emperor (read "Ethiopia"), was originally his rival. Emperor Tewodros, who took *Abeta* Menelik captive and kept him under house arrest, knew his remarkable qualities and gave him his daughter in marriage. Emperor Tewodros' regret when he heard of *Abeto* Menelik's escape was that Menelik did not take his wife with him. Menelik conducted the battle of Adwa from a relatively safe place since his life and death was the life and death of Ethiopia at that time. A disaster worse than that of Metemma would certainly have befallen the country if he had fallen in Adwa. He was a survivor; he knew when and how to fight. That was why he submitted to Emperor Yohannes' authority and gave up his title of *niguse negest* until he was crowned as such after the death of the *Niguse Negest* in 1889.

Emperor Menelik was a revolutionary with a kind heart. Rancor, revenge, cruelty were not part of his vocabulary. He won over his enemies by showing them forgiveness and what seemed sincere love. If he had had the temperament of his predecessors, he would probably have executed King Tekle Haymanot of Gojjam, who abused him publicly and fought him at Imbabo (1882). Emperor Menelik understood that harsh treatment generates hatred among people and that hatred is the enemy of unity and peace. Every one at his court thought that when he heard of the abuse of one of his vassals suffered in Tigray, he would have the offenders severely punished. But his response was, "A country is governed with sensitivity and shrewd tactics, not cruelty." He is the first Ethiopian ruler who stopped the *neftenya* or militia from exploiting the peasantry. He was the first ruler in Ethiopian modern history who insisted on religious tolerance.

Was his army cruel in war? This is a silly question; war is cruel. Was the Emperor unscrupulous? This is another silly question, When it comes to their interests, politicians are, as a rule, unscrupulous. Each of the three contenders for Emperor Tewodros' throne tried to outsmart the

other and to use foreign powers to this end. *Dejjazmach* Kasa/Yohannes helped the British expedition to Meqdela; (Emperor) Tekle Giyorgis/Gobeze did not help only because he was asked by the leader of the expedition to stay away; *Nigus* Menelik sent a congratulatory letter to Queen Victoria for the success of the expedition. What mattered to them was not how they took power but what they did with it. Did they help each other? Only so long as cooperation served their interests. Each felt a duty to defend his own realm, the kings their principalities and the emperors their empire.

If we are unable to forgive in order to solidify our unity afresh, we do not deserve to enjoy the glory of the victory of Adwa, and certainly are not worthy to serve our country. We all have suffered in the past; that is why we are here now in beautiful America, away from the real home. But the time to free ourselves, for the sake of Ethiopia, from the anger against those who have harmed is long over due. I want to tell you this: I have no enemy anywhere in the world, not even in Zimbabwe. But Ethiopia has enemies at the palaces in Asmara and Addis Ababa. That is what concerns me. My enemies are Ethiopia's enemies. I cannot understand those who feel differently on this matter.

How shall we find an astute leader? This question, which has been raised many times, brings me to another question. Why do we need that kind of a leader? Your answer may be "to be led by him or her." But I am not certain that this is your sincere answer. Maybe we want a leader who will give us an Adwa type of victory, a victory won by our people so that we may bask in its glory. But how about a victory that we ourselves fight and win? How about reaping the fruit of our own labor - I mean a victory of struggle in which you and I participate? How long are we going to wait until something happens? If 90 percent of us are waiters, as we seem to be, who will cause that something to happen? I want you to ask yourselves: what is your personal role in liberating Ethiopia? Many of us are not only sitting idle, but are criticizing others for organizing themselves and trying to do something. It is a shame to try to cover up our shameful negligence of our responsibility towards our country by criticizing others. We think we are on top of things by despising others' efforts. It does not work. Let us do something or help others who try to do something. Let us encourage them, or shut up. Discouraging others is a crime against Ethiopia.

(3) Respect is to be earned. The letters that Emperor Yohannes wrote to world powers asking for help and justice did not earn respect for him or for Ethiopia. The contempt General Gordon and Warner Munzinger had for this great nationalist sends chills through the spine of every one who recognizes him, as we all do, as his or her leader. Emperor Menelik did not know how to write beggary. To the contrary, he regularly informed the world powers of his obligation to defend his ancestral land - which was a warning that he would not sit idle while they meddled in Africa's affairs. He bluffed and when it was inevitable he went to war and won.

The respect Emperor Menelik earned went beyond Ethiopia and became the pride of Africa and of black people throughout the world. The British inquired if the Emperor would grant an audience for their high-powered delegation to his palace. They sent the delegation with elaborate gifts when he consented. When the delegation arrived in Addis Ababa, it was asked to camp at its outskirts until the monarch was ready to receive it.

The message the British delegation brought included a phonographic greeting of Queen Victoria to *Etege* Tayitu. The delegation's mission was to convey a request that Ethiopia [i.e. the Emperor] prohibit the transit of arms to the Sudan. What business had the British in the Sudan? And how dare a colonialist power ask an African leader to cooperate with them to colonize an African country, a neighbor at that? Well, that is not what the Emperor asked them. To the contrary, he assured them that he would cooperate with them, explaining that the Sudanese were his enemies as well. What the British did not know was that the Emperor had long ago established a friendly relationship with his neighbors. In fact, a Sudanese delegation was in his palace, sitting

behind curtains, while the negotiation with the British delegation was underway. The British were shocked and embarrassed when the Emperor hinted to them that he knew how they had helped Italy occupy Massawa in 1885. They did not know what to say, nor understand why Menelik mentioned it to them at that particular moment. The Emperor's intent, of course, was to let them know that he would give them a taste of their own medicine in his diplomatic relations with them. He felt no obligation to keep his word when it was given to treacherous politicians.

The respect he earned and how are obvious. But did all black people share in this glory? You would rightly say "yes." But white racists did not want this to be a black man's victory over white man. The West could not tolerate the notion that "the inferior black race of Africa" had defeated "the superior white race of Europe." So how did they deal with the victory of Adwa? Some blamed it on Baratieri, the Italian general who led the war. Others accused the Eritrean *bandas* who abandoned their Italian masters or came over to the side of Ethiopia. Others blamed their spies, Aw'alom and his brother, who chose to earn more birr than a few lire; others started to play the numbers game . . . so many Shoans against so few Italians, as if they did not know this before the battle started. Still others blamed it on the rugged terrain which "favored the Abyssinians," as ~the mountains had sprung up unexpectedly overnight and as if they were not more familiar to their cartographers and native allies more than to the Ethiopian army, most of which came from the far south and the west. The bravery of black Ethiopians, their impeccable patriotism, and the great sacrifice they made to defend Ethiopia were things the West refused to acknowledge.

The most interesting explanation, and one that did lasting damage to Ethiopians' relation with non-Ethiopian blacks is what I read in the April 19, 1896 issue of *The New York Times*. It was titled, "The Most Gifted of Africans." Unfortunately, the title, which is dangerous in itself, is mild when compared to the content of the article. Here is an excerpt:

The experience of the Italians during the past few years with the Abyssinians has shown beyond doubt that these mountaineers of "the Switzerland of Africa" are decidedly a superior race to the other people of the Dark Continent with whom the Europeans have come in contact in their colonization and partition schemes. To a great extent this superiority is the result of their origin and pedigree. Although (they are) the modern representatives of the Ethiopians of myth and history, they are in reality not Ethiopians at all. They are not black, but are of Caucasian descent as pure as the Anglo-Saxon or the Celt. Language and physiology stamp them as members of the Semitic race, and, consequently, as kindred peoples to the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Arabs, the Syrians, the Jews, and other history-making nations of antiquity. To call them Ethiopians in the sense of blacks is a singular misnomer, originating probably in the fact that, being the only African people except the Egyptians known at an early date to the Greek-Latin literature, the term "Ethiopian" gradually was used to designate all Africans, and is now the national name for that very people who, almost alone on the entire continent of Africa, do not belong to the Negro race.

In truth, the Abyssinians are not originally an African race at all. Their earliest traditions point to Southern Arabia as their original seat, and by a singular piece of good fortune, the German traveler, Edward Glaser, who has made four scientific journeys to Southern Arabia, hitherto never explored, has found there the indubitable evidences of the existence of the Abyssinian people in these districts before the days of Christ.

Edward Glaser had, indeed, been to South Arabia and "had found there the indubitable evidences of the existence of ... Abyssinian people ...," just as you and I have found here where we are now, "indubitable evidences" of the existence of Ethiopians in 1996. But that does not make this place the origin of the Ethiopians! The point is, no matter what the West did, it was forced to respect both Menelik and Ethiopia.

(4) Promote gender equality, and rely on each other. Whenever the question of solving national problems arises, we think, generally speaking, of the male population as the source for answers. This is a mistake we must correct. For Emperor Menelik, his consort *Etege* Tayitu was the major source of his wisdom and strength. Tayitu was, indeed, a wise and courageous woman. But in giving her the credit she deserves, people often forget that it was Emperor Menelik's treatment of people that gave Tayitu the chance to be her name, "a shining sun." And his attitude served him well: According to the chronicler, "Shoa's good fortune came about since Tayitu Bitul. Since then the kingdom of Abba Oagneu [Dagneu was Emperor Menelik's horse name) expand by the day. The horse of Abba Dagneu, having the horse of Gobena Daqe [= Dache] as its advance power, refused to recognize borders."

How did Emperor Menelik develop this enlightened attitude towards women? Perhaps from the relatively powerful position of the women in his family as he was growing up. *Ras Sahle Sillase*, Emperor Menelik's grandfather, used to stand as a servant in front of his mother (*adegdegew*), even after he became *nigus* of Shoa. And he never made any decision which his wife *Weyzero* Bezzabish had not approved.

Of course, as the subject of this talk is Adwa, I use the example of Menelik and Tayitu, but obviously, my point is not just that men should let their wives help them, but that we must permit - and demand -- that women in all walks of life play an equal part in the political and social life of our nation. Such equality is in the best interests of each of us and of Ethiopia, and the rightful place of Ethiopian women.

(5) Lessons for the TPLF. The TPLF can also learn a lesson from Adwa. History cannot be distorted or erased. Distortion may serve as powerful propaganda for the day but in the final analysis both distortions and propaganda become an unerasable disgrace for those who advocated them. Think what the coming generations of Ethiopians will say whenever the TPLF/EPLF and their leaders are mentioned.

Moreover, no matter what one does, history cannot be undone. The Italians came to Ethiopia forty years after Adwa, burnt its people with poisonous gas, and declared that they had avenged their 1896 defeat and erased it from the pages of history. But had they? Obviously not. Rather, Italy's aggression and its crimes of 1936 are remembered as Italy's second disgrace and Adwa is remembered annually with pride and joy.

Perhaps there are parts of Ethiopian history the TPLF does not like, such as the country's struggle to survive as a nation? Well, like it or not, that glorious history of survival cannot be erased. The best the TPLF may do is to overshadow Ethiopia's past history by making its own stunning patriotic history. What it is doing now at Adwa will be remembered always for what it is: a disgrace.

(6) Lessons for TPLF supporters: Do the supporters of TPLF/EPLF have a lesson to learn from the victory at Adwa? The answer is emphatically yes! It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to defeat the colonialists if General Baratieri's local supporters had not come to the side of their Ethiopia at that very critical moment in the history of their country. When Baratieri's Ethiopian supporters realized that the issue was not the usual family feud but the survival of Ethiopia, they sent the colonialists packing. Division after division of native Eritreans and Tigreans on whom Baratieri had relied heavily for the success of his invasion came to the side of Emperor Menelik. Following the divisions, the civilian population did what ~ could do, cutting communication lines between Asmara and Baratieri's camp and harassing Baratieri's army,

I challenge you, my brothers and sisters from the north, to open your mind and allow your eyes to see what I and all objective observers see. There is absolutely no reason why you and I should be

on different sides if we all have Ethiopia's well being in mind. I urge you not to side any more with Ethiopia's enemies. Give up your ideology of "Tigrinya speakers first." It is a cruel idea born from a selfish mind.

And if we do have different visions for Ethiopia, let us each present our visions to the Ethiopian people, first giving our word under oath that we will support what ever the people choose. Let our struggle be for the Ethiopian nation to be free to choose what it wants. Let our music be Ethiopians' song of "Free at last."

7. Unity and the Orominya Speakers. Orominya speakers are, as far as I know, at the forefront of the struggle to promote unity among Ethiopians. They work with COEOF; one hears them at AAPO meetings. We see them at political gatherings called to discuss unity, liberation and the democratization of Ethiopia. This should not surprise non Orominya speakers. If the Oromo are not for a united Ethiopia, then who will be? Orominya speakers constitute one of the two largest ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Moreover, since the sixteenth century, the Ethiopian polity has been dominated and administered by the Oromo. The country as well as the state has been largely shaped by their demographics and that political activity.

Unfortunately, it appears that many non-Orominya speakers believe that the Oromo do not support a united Ethiopia. This erroneous impression is most likely a result of the fact that, unlike the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Oromo who advocate Ethiopia's territorial integrity are not organized independent of other political organizations. While their choice not to be organized along ethnic lines is highly commendable, the politically detrimental repercussions of that choice are clear. It has allowed the OLF and other non-unionist Oromo groups to claim that they represent all of the Oromos, including the unionists. It is time for the unionist Oromos to make it clear that OLF's secessionist agenda is not their agenda. Oromos for a united Ethiopia must be heard loud and clear. It is time for these Ethiopians to invent a means by which they show the world their views about their country Ethiopia.

The Oromos and other ethnic groups must realize that they are subject to exploitation if they do not establish inter-group solidarity. I believe that the aspiration of all ethnic groups of Ethiopia can be attained within united Ethiopia if all Ethiopians lay the foundation for that unity.

(8) Zealous Patriots: I am not sure what zealous patriots can learn from the victory of Adwa and Menelik's experience in leading a multi-ethnic nation. The Ethiopians I call zealous patriots are those who, like myself, do not want to compromise the territorial integrity of Ethiopia. For them the preservation of Ethiopia's unity is of paramount importance. How many such Ethiopians are there at this gathering?

Can you tell me what would make you change your mind about Ethiopia's unity? Nothing, right? Good, but how about TPLF's/EPLF's policy of hatred? These two enemies of Ethiopia use hatred as a system to keep linguistic groups apart. For example, I presume you will agree that many Amharic speakers are zealous patriots. It is no accident then, that Amharic speakers are targets of TPLF's/EPLF's policy of hatred and persecution. Wives of such zealots have been raped before the eyes of their children and husbands; young girls have been taken away from their families to serve as concubines and servants; men have been slaughtered with kitchen knives. Such atrocities, too many to recount here, have all been committed with the goal of promoting amongst other Amharic speaking zealots an attitude of "to hell with Tigrinya speakers; to hell with Orominya speakers, to hell with the Somalis", etc. If the TPLF achieves its goal, as it seems it has, at least in some corners, these zealous patriots have indeed changed their minds regarding the question of Ethiopia's territorial integrity. I read an article recently which enjoyed a warm reception among zealous patriots, primarily because the article called for the secession of Ethiopia from Tigray. This is clearly a change of mind.

Can we wish that the river Mereb remain a divide between Eritrea and the rest of Ethiopia and at the same time consider ourselves zealous patriots or *hager weddad ltyopiyawiyen*? Can we wish that Tigray secede because opportunist Tigrinya speakers are used by the TPLF/EPLF as catalysts to divide and rule and at the same time consider ourselves zealous patriots? Will the atrocities perpetrated on Amharic speakers by members of the Oromo Liberation Front in Arsi, Chercher and other places make us wish that the Oromo secede? if yes, then where is our uncompromising stand towards the territorial integrity of Ethiopia? Are we for or against secession?

My suggestion, is as follows. We must deal with the contradiction in our reasoning either by recognizing that we are not the advocates of one Ethiopia we imagine ourselves to be, or, preferably, by establishing a new and sincere relationship between members of the different ethnic groups that oppose the TPLF/EPLF but have reservations about working with others to form a united Ethiopia. We should start by asking ourselves this simple question: Why are some of us for secession and some of us for the territorial integrity of the country? Let us find the answer and deal with it up front. Could it be because the previous systems have made some of us feel that the state is ours while it made others feel the opposite? If so, it is time that we all agree on a system that can make every Ethiopian feel that the country, and the state belongs to him or her. If I reject a system it should be not only because it alienates me or allows others to infringe on my rights but also because it alienates other Ethiopians and allows me infringe on their rights. In short, I cannot support a system that is not fair to all Ethiopians. We can and must create a system that we all can support.

What the TPLF/EPLF are doing to Ethiopia is a phenomenon for which one can hardly find a parallel in the country's history. Some people compare this national disgrace with the *Zemene Mesafint* (1769-1872) during which the warlords divided the country into, administratively speaking, semi-independent principalities. There are, indeed, some similarities between the two: One of the similarities is the fact that both periods were initiated by Tigrinya speakers, that of the *Zemene Mesafint* by Mika'el Sihul and his Tigrean army. But it is the differences which should concern us.

First, during the *Zemene Mesa fint*, none of the chieftains or warlords ever thought that his realm was not part of Ethiopia. None of them was so engrossed, like the *killi* politicians, in the affairs of his or her realm only. Ethiopia was always their identity. You would be amazed to see the similarity among some of the letters they wrote to foreign powers on affairs of national concern. Yes, they fought among themselves, but primarily for the right to be the national leader of Ethiopia, by gaining territory inch by inch or all at once.

Second, during the *Zemene Mesafint*, Ethiopians lived wherever they wanted and intermarried freely, without being harassed by anyone, ruler or common citizen, for their choices. Ethnicity did not then, as it does now, put people asunder.

Third, the principality administration (following the central administration), the national commerce, the national education, and foreign relation had a *de facto* common language, a *lingua franca*. You may say that today too we have the same language performing the same service. Yes, but the TPLF/EPLF is bent on cutting the linguistic link that bands the nation. The Woyyane have already seen to it that its use outside the so-called Amhara Bantustan is being curtailed. For the first time in the nation's history, the letter heads of Ethiopian embassies are void of national language and script. Children of Amharic-speaking Ethiopians in non-Amhara Bantustans are not allowed to receive education in the language their ancestors taught them. The rationale of the TPLF and its *ki/lil* surrogates is that since non-Amharic speakers were forced to be educated in the national language under previous governments, these children should be instructed in a language they

do not know. Ironically, those who maintain this position know, unlike those who administered the previous governments, that what they are doing is terribly wrong. It is ethnic revenge!

The Derge and the TPLF/EPLF are the last groups that one would wish upon an enemy, let alone upon our Ethiopia. Ethiopians did not deserve the Derg, and they do not deserve the TPLF. A group whose world is ethnicity is not qualified to speak in the name of a multi ethnic nation. It is time for them to go. Let us pray and do what it takes to replace them. It is not only Americans who say "no pain no gain." Many years ago the Ethiopian poet has put it succinctly and beautifully:

"Without the cross and trial in struggle, No one is able to accomplish anything good"

I would like to conclude by confessing that I realize that I may offend many people by my opposition to the TPLF/EPLF and my uncompromising stand against ethnic policies which are bent on changing or scrapping my identity. But I would like to assure these people that I do not offend them as much as people who support the TPLF/EPLF offend Ethiopia.

Thank you.

