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ERITREAN ASSEMBLY

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Imagining the Nation:

Assessing the Role and Functioning of the Eritrean Assembly in the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation (1952-1962)

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Leiden University



African Studies Centre

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ACRONYMS

BCA	British Consulate Asmara
BCAA	British Embassy Addis Ababa
BMA	British Military Administration
CRIE	Comitato Rappresentativo Degli Italiani in Eritrea
EDF	Eritrean Democratic Front
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
ELM	Eritrean Liberation Movement
FO	Foreign Office (London UK)
MFH	Mahber Fikri Hager (Association to the Love of Country)
MLWP	Muslim League of Western Province
RDC	The Research and Documentation Center, Asmara, Eritrea
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US/USA	United States (of America)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS¹

Abba	Ecclesiastical title, meaning 'Father'
Abune	Title of the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Eritrea. equivalent to Bishop (Abun if not followed by name)
Balambaras	Title of respect/rank, equivalent to 'commander of the fortress'
Bashai	A basic title in the feudal hierarchy roughly equal to a 'quarter-master sergeant'
Bitweded	Title of high respect, meaning 'the beloved' (a trusted one by the Emperor)
Blatta	A basic title in the feudal hierarchy equivalent to counselor, meaning 'valued, trusted'
Dejazmatch/Degiat	Title of respect/rank, 'commander of the palace gate' or the 'center group'
Fitawrari	Title of respect/rank, 'commander of the vanguard'
Grazmatch	Title of respect/rank, 'commander of the left column'
Haji	A Muslim title given to those who made the pilgrimage to Mecca
Kadi	A Muslim title, meaning 'Judge'
Kegnazmatch	Title of respect/rank, 'commander of the right column'
Melake Selam	Term of respect meaning 'Angel of Peace'
Meslene	Title of respect, equivalent to (sub) district chief.
Mufti	Head and religious leader of Muslim community
Nazir	(sub) district chief among Muslims of Western Province of Eritrea
Nebure'ed	The ecclesiastical and secular leader of Church of Aksum
Ras	Title of respect/rank, equivalent to a duke and commander of the army, most senior rank just below the King/Emperor. Mostly Governor-General of a province.
Sheikh	A Muslim title equivalent to Mr.

¹ Although some are military titles they contained etymological meaning and applicable to civilian ranks.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on examining the role and functioning of the Eritrean Assembly during the decade of Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation. Established in 1952 with the beginning of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation, the Eritrean Assembly played a pivotal role in the process of defending and diminishing Eritrean autonomy. Although constantly harassed by the Eritrean and Ethiopian authorities a small group of federalist members of the first Eritrean Assembly fought hard to maintain the autonomy of Eritrea and the integrity of the Federation. During the terms of the second and third Eritrean Assemblies, the systematic exclusion of the Federalists and the domination of the Assembly by elements loyal to Ethiopia made the Assembly more of an instrument of the Ethiopian government at the expense of Eritrean autonomy. Although in the later years of the federation the Assembly was reduced into a collaborative body, it became reluctant at the end to cooperate with the Ethiopian government on the issue of terminating Eritrea's federal status and incorporation of the territory into the Ethiopian Empire. This paper attempted to discuss the rise and fall of the Eritrean Assembly in the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation years and the political dynamics that surrounded it.

Eritrea: in Northeast Africa



Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

On May 24, 1991 Eritrea's long struggle against Ethiopian hegemony ended with the liberation of Eritrea. Two years later, on May 24, 1993, Eritrea declared its *de jure* independence with the internationally supervised referendum of April 1993 and emerged as Africa's youngest and fifty-second nation state. Eritrea is located in Northeast Africa, bordered on the North and West by the Sudan, on the South by Ethiopia, on the Southeast by Djibouti, and on the East by the Red Sea. It covers a total area of 124,323 square kilometers, including its over 350 islands. According to a report by UN data 2009, its population is 5.1 million.¹

Eritrea's emergence as a new state in Northeast Africa is a result of a long and complex political and military struggle. In many African countries European colonial rule came to an end with the independence of the former colonies and the 1950s witnessed the emergence of free African states. In Eritrea, unlike the cases in much of Africa, this happened earlier but in a different fashion. This came about when in 1941, as part of World War II, the Allied Forces defeated the Italians in Eritrea. While many African countries gained their independence in the 1950s, Eritrea missed its decolonization. Following the collapse of Italian colonial rule in Eritrea, Ethiopia claimed the territory as part of its kingdom that was taken by the Italians during the late 19th century European colonial expansion. The aspiration of Eritrean modern and traditional elites in the period poles apart ranging from a claim for complete independence to union with Ethiopia. In December 1950, after a decade long local and international political struggle over its future, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia by UN decision. A decade later, the abolition of the federal arrangement and the incorporation of Eritrea into the Ethiopian Empire triggered an armed conflict between these two Horn of Africa countries. Lasting for three decades, the protracted bloody war came to an end, with the formation of an independent Eritrean state, in 1991.

The 1950 UN federal resolution gave Eritrea an autonomous status under the Ethiopian Crown. Hence, in the federal association with Ethiopia, Eritrea had its own government and internal administration. Within the Eritrean administration, the Eritrean Assembly was designated to act

¹ <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=ERITREA>

as representative of the Eritrean people and look after the rights of Eritrea in the federation. The Eritrean Assembly is the core subject of this thesis. This study is, therefore, an appraisal of the role played by the Eritrean Assembly in the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation (1952-19962). It is intended to monitor the Assembly's role and its functioning in the federation years. It covers the crucial developments in the Eritrean-Ethiopian relation during the period and the resistance and collaboration manifested in the Eritrean Assembly towards Ethiopia's policy in Eritrea.

1.2 Problem Statement

The federal era was a decisive period that determined much of the destiny of Eritrea for the subsequent four decades. With the arrangement terminated in 1962 Eritrea went into a protracted armed struggle against Ethiopia. The Eritrean armed struggle for independence was a long struggle for self-determination known in the 1980's as Africa's longest war² (A title since claimed for South Sudan). The war ravaged both countries and culminated in 1991.

The root cause of this conflict lies on these countries' relation in the federation years. The dismantlement of the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation was the core point. A great deal of literature was produced on the fatal Federation. Several scholars contributed plenty of studies on the period with different perspectives. Nonetheless, the role and contribution of the Eritrean Assembly in the federation and its dismantlement remains incomplete. The existing studies on the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation inadequately documented and studied the Eritrean Assembly. The literature regarding the Assembly, therefore, is obscure. Except few, most of the works that have been produced focusing on the federal era marginalized the Assembly and inclined to focus on the actions and practices of the other players, such as the Ethiopian Emperor and the Ethiopian State. The role and action of domestic institution and actors, such as the Eritrean Assembly and the groups it consisted is a subject grossly neglected. The purpose here is to redefine the central issue related to the Eritrean Assembly.

The Assembly provides us a way to understand the Eritrean-Ethiopian relation during the federation years and the conflicting political dynamics of the period. Even though the Assembly was a central figure in the federation of the two countries and played divisive role in process of the Federation's dismantlement, no single scholarly work has handled the issue rigorously and

² David Pool, *Eritrea: Africa's Longest War*. (London: Anti-slavery Society, 1982).

independently. This is partly due to inaccessibility to the data related to the Assembly caused by the long and unabated war among the two countries.

Furthermore, the role of the Eritrean Assembly in the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation was controversial. The Assembly which was composed of two rival groups, the Unionists and the Federalists, was a subject of debate for the role it played in protecting and destroying Eritrean autonomy. Several key decisions were passed by this body that led to the demise of the federation. Following the termination of the Federation, Eritrean nationalist groups argued that the federation was unilaterally obliterated by the Ethiopian government and Eritrea was eventually annexed. The Unionist movement is dismissed as the conspiratorial work of Ethiopia.³ For the Ethiopian government, on the other hand, the popular movement was the Unionists. The Ethiopian government claimed that the federal arrangement was ended and Eritrea was incorporated into the Ethiopian empire at the request of Eritreans. According to Emperor Haile Selassie, Ethiopia only accepted the Eritrean wishes:

The people of Eritrea, through their representatives gathered together in the Eritrean Assembly, recognizing the harmful consequences of the operation of the federal system through the experiences of the past decade, desirous of living together with their other Ethiopian brothers without hindrance or obstacle, I have formally requested, by their resolution voluntarily and unanimously adopted on November 14, 1962 that the federation be dissolved. In its place, they have asked for the complete administrative integration of Eritrea with the rest of Ethiopia. ... We have accepted this resolution and have consented to its being placed into effect.⁴

In the few academic discourse on the Eritrean Assembly, some argue the Assembly was a self-governing and legitimate body that acted freely while others claim it was operating under pressure from Ethiopia and manipulated by the Ethiopian government. There was also a wide discrepancy in the academic literature on the critical final role of the Assembly in dissolving the federation. The issue of whether the Eritrean Assembly "unanimously voted" or not to end the federation and merge Eritrea into the Ethiopian empire remains ambiguous. Some studies suggested there was a unanimous vote from the Assembly while others refute this argument.⁵

³ Eritrean Liberation Front, *Eritrea and the Federal Act*. (Cairo, 1977), pp. 95-97.

⁴ *Ethiopia Observer*, Vol. VI, 1963, *The Emperor's Speech on the Reunion of Eritrea*, November 15, 1962.

⁵ Vivid expressions of these arguments are forwarded on the works of scholars such as Alemseged Tesfai, Tekie Fessehazion, Ruth Iyob, Tekeste Negash, John Spencer, Lloyd Ellingson and Zewde Retta.

In light of these arguments the need for more empirical research on the issue provides the key motive for me to conduct a more detailed research on the role of the Eritrean Assembly in the federal relation of the two countries. What exactly transpired within the Eritrean political sphere in the federation years? What were the perceptions and political actions of the internal social forces inside and around the Eritrean Assembly? These questions demand the need for more empirical study. While working in the Research and Documentation Center of Eritrea (RDC), I have come to know that there is a bulk of serviceable source materials related to this theme. This gave me the incentive to carry out this study. Therefore, based on the findings from the field research, this thesis aimed to investigate the role and functioning of the Assembly in the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation. This study, I believe, will contribute a lot to a better understanding of the precarious Eritrean-Ethiopian relation in the federation year in general and the role of the Eritrean Assembly in particular.

1.3 Research Question

The overarching research question of this study is: What was the role of the Eritrean Assembly in the process of defending and/or ending Eritrean autonomy in the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation?

The study also investigates: How did the Assembly respond to Ethiopia's political ambition of incorporating Eritrea into its empire? What role did the balance of power in the Assembly (of the different groups) play in its reaction?

Based on findings from the field research in Eritrea the study affirms that the Eritrean Assembly role can be categorized into three. Although it had a substantial elements of Unionists, the first Eritrean Assembly (1952-1956) strived hard to maintain the autonomous status of Eritrea and the integrity of the federation. Erected with rigid election and dominated by Unionists, the second Eritrean Assembly (1956-1960) became more of an instrument to Ethiopia's policy of annexing Eritrea. Many of the legislations that substantially diminished Eritrea's federal status were enacted in the term of the second Eritrean Assembly. The role of the third and final Eritrean Assembly (1960-1962) was insignificant, as the federal status of Eritrea was terminated without the Assembly's consideration of Eritrea's formal integration into the Ethiopian Empire. The Assembly had no say on the final issue and the federation was principally terminated by the Ethiopian government, which never accepted Eritrea as a partner in the federation.

This research has used two approaches to assess the role of the Eritrean Assembly in the Federation. The first approach focuses on the Eritrean circles. This looks at the action and function of the Eritrean Assembly, its influential members and other leading Eritrean figures outside of the Assembly. The second approach monitored the role of the Ethiopian government in the overall process that led to the termination of the federation. The Ethiopian government's actions and its close relation with Eritrean leadership is also scrutinized in this approach.

This paper will argue that the federal arrangement was terminated due to Ethiopia's unwavering political ambition of incorporating Eritrea into its empire. Although in the later federation years the Eritrean Assembly was used as an instrument towards the realization of Ethiopia's policy in Eritrea, the Federation was terminated by the willpower of the Ethiopian government. This study will also indicate that the Eritrean Assembly's potential to safeguard Eritrean autonomy and the integrity of the federation was collapsed by the combined attacks of the Federal (Ethiopian) and Eritrean authorities that diluted the power of the Assembly. The grip of Ethiopian authorities and the executive branch of the Eritrean government on the Assembly, and their success to staff the Assembly with amenable people largely contributed to the weakness of the Assembly.

1.4 Methodology

This research is a result of six months of fieldwork research carried out in Eritrea between August 2012 and January 2013. A qualitative research approach was applied in executing this thesis. The research is based on an empirical study that was carried out through archival research, interviews and literature review. For the discussion of this study I have gathered information both from primary and secondary sources. The literature on the subject being scant, I have focused predominantly on archival sources, interviews and newspapers produced in the period the study focuses.

Archival sources are the major data sources that formed the basis of this study. The archival research was carried out in two centers; in the capital Asmara and in the provincial town of Mendefera, although I have discovered later that the records in Mendefera were mostly available in the RDC. The most valuable archival source came from the custody of the RDC which is acting as the national archive of Eritrea. The Center is located in Asmara where I was residing for much of my fieldwork period. In the RDC I was able to fully utilize the federal period

archival records, which were produced during the ten years span of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation.

The archival sources encompasses the Eritrean Assembly minutes which elaborate the main issues raised in the Assembly and the discussions around them; the different motions of the Assembly; several of the speeches of Emperor Haile Selassie's Representatives in Eritrea; correspondences; appeals; resignation letters; Ethiopian intelligence reports and archives related to Eritrean Assembly elections. I have also made extensive use of the various newspapers published during the federation years. Newspapers of the federal period, which were used as the mouthpiece of the contrary political groups, are vital additional sources to this study. Several newspaper articles are important in elaborating the position of the antagonistic groups in the Assembly as well as public opinion and discussions on the Assembly. Other unpublished sources such as memoirs and official reports are also used as sources of information for this study.

The collected data are useful in drawing the trajectory of the Assembly, its structure and group composition. They were essential in answering questions such as how did the debate on Eritrean identity and the clash of vision on the country's autonomy took shape in the ten years life of the Assembly? What was the nature of the debate? Why did members align themselves to one position or another? How did they try to achieve their set of goals? What were the courses of actions taken during the period? Why? etc.

In addition to the archives and newspapers, the rich collection of the RDC provided me with some audio archives. I am lucky to discover interviews previously conducted with some former members of the Eritrean Assembly. These interviews were made in 1990/1991 by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea (RICE), a predecessor of the RDC, aimed at documenting Eritrean history. Besides, I was also able to gather additional interviews made with former Eritrean Assembly members and other people close to the Assembly. These interviews were conducted by an Asmara based historian and researcher, Mr. Alemseged Tesfai, who made the interviews as part of his research projects that focused on the 1940s and 1950s history of Eritrea.

Interviewing former Assembly members was one of the approaches of this research. This would enrich and to make the study more fruitful. Optimistic of meeting a handful of former Eritrean Assembly members, my initial thought was to make as many interviews as possible. I managed, however, to find only two former members of the Eritrean Assembly alive. One was member of

the first Eritrean Assembly and the other member of the second and the third Assemblies. I interviewed both in Asmara although one is living in the town of Addi-Keyih.

Having an in-depth interview with members is crucial in gathering empirical evidences on some of the ambiguous issues related to the study. As members of the Assembly were the main actors of the study theme; they might gave me vital explanations on various issues related to the Assembly's function. Fortunately, my limited number of informants was partly compensated by the interviews I have collected from the RDC repository and Mr. Alemseged Tesfai. These interview are crucial additions to the study and to some extent reparation for those missing informants. The interviews are useful to identify the gaps of knowledge in the archives. They bring more plausible explanation not only on what happened but also why something happened. In pursuit of some past events and especially in search for explanations on events and motives behind alignment of peoples to one cause or another, it is difficult to depend only on archives. Some information could be vague in the archives which the interviews can complement. Therefore, both sources are complementary to each other.

In addition to the empirical data, in order to establish the basis of the study and augment the overall historical narrative, I have consulted works that have been produced in relation to the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation. Published and unpublished works, books, articles, Ph.D dissertations and others related texts are used as supplementary to the archival and oral sources. Thus, a thorough literature review was an integral part of this study. In Asmara, I have also gathered some locally produced literature and reports related to the study. The local book shops and the repository of the RDC were the main sources of these materials. I believe the breadth and depth of the sources I have utilized, some never used before, enabled me to present this study which is based on comprehensive documentation.

1.5 State of Research

In the academic literature that focused on the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation the account of the Eritrean Assembly is cited in a generalized manner. Although some scattered information on the Assembly are available in the works of many historians concerned with history of Eritrea and Ethiopia, the existing literature has been mainly associated with the Ethiopian state's role in the federation years. During the 1980s and early 1990s a number of studies focusing on the Eritrean struggle for independence were produced. Many of these publications have provided only a scant

coverage to the Eritrean Assembly. Hence, there has yet to be an extensive study conducted on the Eritrean Assembly as a focal point in the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation.

The most comprehensive works that have given a broad coverage to the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation is the work of Tekeste Negash. With his 1997 published work, *Eritrea and Ethiopia the Federal Experience*, Tekeste is the first author to provide an extensive analysis of Eritrean-Ethiopian federation. His work, mainly based on information of the British diplomatic corps, is well-written and very informative source. His account, although written from a pure pro-Ethiopian perspective and tries to deliberately undermine Eritrean nationalism, serves as one of the most detailed texts available regarding the federal period. It gives a wide coverage of the activities of Eritrean political forces such as the Unionist Party and the Muslim League and their respective relation with the Ethiopian government. It also present a good explanation on how the Eritrean Assembly served as instrument in the process of demising the federation. He makes ample reference to the conflicts between the Ethiopian/Eritrean governments and the Muslim League.

One of the most recent publications on the federal period is Alemseged Tesfai's Tigrinya book published in 2005, *Federeshn Ertra Ms Ethiopia: Kab Matienso Ksab Tedla 1951-1955*. Focusing mainly on local actors and the major Eritrean political groups in the federal period, Alemseged produced a comprehensive study on the federation years. Although his work covers the first half of the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation, it is a much deeper account on the political dynamics of Eritrea during the federation. His work widely discussed the motives of the Eritrean political groups and their relation with Ethiopia in the period. The study also treated the account of the Eritrean Assembly. Unlike other works, which are more concerned with telling the general narrative of the federation history, Alemseged presented far more detail and coherent narrative to a better understanding of the social context of the antagonistic Eritrean groups investigating the economic and religious motives that lies behind these movements' activities.

Tekie Fessehazion was another scholar who contributed to the study of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation. His *Eritrea: From Federation to Annexation* (unpublished 1990) and *A Brief Encounter with Democracy: From Acquiescence to Resistance During Eritrea's Early Federation Years* (1998) are particularly beneficial to this research. Tekie's 1990 work is an account of the rise and fall of the federation. His 1998 study presented the flourishing democracy

in Eritrea mainly focusing on the Eritrean Assembly and the brief spell of press freedom that Eritrea enjoyed in the early federation years.

Another detailed work to explore the period is that of Zewde Retta, *Ye Ertra Gudday 1941-1963* (The Affair of Eritrea in the Era of Emperor Haile Selassie I). Given Zewde's position, as a reporter for the Press and Information Center of the Ethiopian Government in the federation year and his closeness to events in the period, his account serves as one of the vital sources to the study period. His work is vital in portraying the discussions on Eritrean issue in the yard of Emperor Haile Selassie. Bocresion Haile's unpublished work, *The Collusion on Eritrea* was also a good source on the federation giving a fair coverage to events around the Eritrean Assembly. Lloyd Ellingson's 1986 Ph.D dissertation "Eritrea: Separatism and Irredentism, 1941-1985", is also another invaluable study that have made good coverage to the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation and the Eritrean Assembly.

Several other works that have highlighted general account on and around the Eritrean Assembly, notably Spencer's *Ethiopia At Bay*, Dawit Wolde Giorgis' *Red Tears*, Ruth Eyob's *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence*, as well as other related studies have been utilized within this study for their contribution in supplement the historical narrative of the federation period.

1.6 Relevance of the Study

This research investigates the historic role and functioning of the Eritrean Assembly in the precarious Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation. Although several studies have been produced on the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation, the history of the Eritrean Assembly is an uncharted subject and the knowledge on the Assembly remained least developed. No single scholarly work handled the subject rigorously that might help to clarify the ambiguous role the Assembly played in the federation years. Some of the available literature is with clear errors related to facts as well as chronology and recitation of events. I believe this study may help reformulate the terms of academic discourse, as well as public debate and perception on the Eritrean Assembly.

The study has also great relevance in politics and contemporary perceptions of the strained Eritrean-Ethiopian relations. For the last seventy years the relationship of these neighboring countries was that of war and tension. In the Eritrean-Ethiopian relations, the federal period is

described as a decisive and fatal.⁶ After the demise of this arrangement and the incorporation of Eritrea into the Ethiopian empire both countries engulfed in a protracted war which lasted for three decades. After a brief spell, with the independence of Eritrea in 1991, the two countries resume their conflict in the bloody "border" war (1998-2000) which is still unresolved to this day. Today both countries are in a tense and potentially unstable relation with their armies separated by just few hundred meters.

The conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia has its root in their histories. There were few studies on the period preceding the era of conflict and these were inadequately documented. The federal period needs to be closely looked at because of its relevance towards a better understanding of the background to the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict and their present strained relation. According to Plaut, the current tension had many causes and most of them intertwined and rooted in the history of the two countries. He said: "...both countries have long memories and seldom forgive or forget past wrongs, whether real or imagined. No single issue caused this war. It was the outcome of years of suspicion and hostility that finally exploded into open conflict."⁷ Studying the historical relations of these countries is a crucial contribution towards understanding the problem surrounding these countries.

Furthermore, the study will also be an addition to the existing knowledge on the political history of Eritrea and believed to contribute a bit to the historiography of both Eritrea and Ethiopia. While conferring the challenges of Eritrean historiography, Bairu Tafla indicated that "despite the availability of serviceable source materials, Eritrean history has remained by and large undeveloped."⁸ I am hopeful that this study will fill some gap in the less studied period of Eritrean history and enrich the existing literature. Besides, Eritrea is one of the newest and the least studied countries in Africa. In this sense, the study will have an input in broadening our knowledge of the country.

The study is mainly based on primary source materials (archives and informants) which are little utilized by scholars on the subject. Hence, it will be the first of its kind to look at the rise and fall

⁶ Richard Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-East Africa: Genealogies of Conflict since 1800*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 154.

⁷ Dominique Jacquin-Berdal and Martin Plaut, *Unfinished Business: Ethiopia and Eritrea at War*. (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, Inc. 2005), p. 3-4 and 29.

⁸ Bairu Tafla, "Interdependence Through Independence: The Challenges of Eritrean Historiography," in Harold G. Marcus (ed.), *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies*, Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Michigan State University 5-10 September, 1994, Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville, 1994, pp. 497-514.

of the Eritrean Assembly. It is my conviction that this will contribute to the originality of the work and the research can add further knowledge to the existing Eritrean-Ethiopian studies in general and the federal period in particular.

1.7 Framework

In order to conceptualize the role and operation of the Eritrean Assembly in the Federation years, we need to look at what Eritreans experienced in the decade following the end of Italian colonial rule. The Assembly cannot be fully understood and conceptualized without a clear understanding of the groups it consisted. The decade long post-Italian period needs to be closely scrutinized because of its relevance towards a better understanding of the background to the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation and the Eritrean Assembly.

According to Mbebe, the notion 'post colony' identifies specifically a given historical trajectory that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization. In describing the post-colony he noted that "the post colony is chaotically pluralistic, yet it has nonetheless an internal coherence. It is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and a lack of proportion as well as by distinctive ways in which identities are multiplied, transformed and put into circulation."⁹ This exemplifies the Eritrean experience following the end of Italian colonial rule. The surfacing of multiple identities in Eritrea did not take long once the Italian rule was ousted in the country. The rise of these multiple identities in Eritrea was influenced by the multifarious nature of Eritrean society both in terms of ethnicity and religion. Consequently, in the post colonial Eritrea, different political groups emerged each having its own separate logic for better future.

The rise of the diametrically opposite groups, the Unionists and the anti-unionists, in the post-Italian Eritrea was a vivid manifestation of this. These groups 'imagined' their community in different ways. The Eritrea that the Unionists imagined was not the same Eritrea that the anti-unionists especially the Muslim League imagined. Apparently this phenomenon continues to be contentious in the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation years and strongly reflected in the Eritrean Assembly's politics, a body which was composed of both the Unionists and anti-unionists.

⁹ Achille Mbembe, "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 62, 1, (1992), p. 3.

In most African countries separate identities were forged which gave way to different nationalisms.¹⁰ Likewise, Eritreans failed to forge a common national identity as part of the imagination of the postcolonial nation. The religious and ethnic based local and regional identities, that needed careful negotiation to develop into a common national identity, hampered the development of a distinct Eritrean identity and nationalism. The Unionists and anti-unionists, suspicious of each other's motive, rallied their respective communities in separate way.

The anti-unionists groups initially called for an independent Eritrean nation and later fought for the preservation of Eritrean autonomy when the country was federated with Ethiopia. Barrington's definition of nationalism well describes these group's position. Barrington defined nationalism as "the pursuit –through argument or other activity- of a set of rights and privileges for the self-defined members of the nation, including, at a minimum, territorial autonomy or independence."¹¹ Nationalism typically is taken to mean support for political action in favor of one's own set of people, whatever that may be, where usually the political action in question is attainment of autonomy or independence, or prevailing over other states.¹²

The Unionists position was similar to what Barrington call *Primordial* nationalism.¹³ According to Ronald this kind of nationalism is a state-seeking nationalism that involves movements or parties which accept or assume the reality of the nation and work to realize it in a polity. Such nationalism, Ronald said: "presuppose some shared features –such as language earlier historic polities identified with a people, an ethnonym, or belief in a common origin– that are often employed by nationalists to justify political claims."¹⁴ This form of national identity, based on deep rooted features such as race, language, religion and other cultural features, was exercised among the Unionists to build a close attachment with the Ethiopian state.

The political division among Eritreans was exacerbated by external involvement, mainly by that of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government persistently claimed that Eritrea was an integral part of

¹⁰ Pal Ahluwala, *Politics and Post-Colonial Theory: African Inflections*. (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 69.

¹¹ Lowell W. Barrington, "Nationalism and Independence," in Lowell W. Barrington (ed), *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist State*. (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 10.

¹² Joseph M. Whitmeyer, "Elites and Popular Nationalism," *British Journal of Sociology*, 53, 3, (2002), p. 322.

¹³ Barrington, *op cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalism, Nation Making, and the Postcolonial States of Asia, Africa, and Eurasia," in Lowell W. Barrington (ed), *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist State*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 290.

its empire before the Italian colonial occupation of the territory in 1890. The Ethiopian state, therefore, gave its backing to the irredentist Unionist movement, which was also aspiring the union of Eritrea with the Ethiopia. By increasing the suspicion and hostility of Eritrean political groups to each other, the external involvement in postcolonial Eritrean politics hampered the possibility of bargain and improvisation among Eritreans and led them to develop separate identities and different imagination of the nation.

The Ethiopian state's position in the period can be better explained with what Ronald called "hyper nationalism". This external-territory-claiming nationalism is the aggressive assertion of a state's or nation's superiority over others or other territories and willingness to use force to achieve subjugation of others.¹⁵ It looks beyond the state to territory abroad and pursue control over other territory. The claiming of further territory is most likely to occur in the "core" state of a former empire. In this case the nation sees the independence of the new state as a defeat. Thus, it considers itself as rebuilder of the former state or empire and reclaims the land that the nation is "entitled to."¹⁶ This kind of expansive form of territorial nationalism may not only about rebuilding lost empire, it could appear in the case of nations that have a strong belief that an emotionally important part of the homeland remains outside the borders of the new state. In such a case, by manipulating history the state may pursue control over missing territory.¹⁷ The Ethiopian government's territorial claims on Eritrea that "historically and culturally the territory was an integral part of Ethiopia"¹⁸ was a clear expression of this external territory claim.

These considerations are quite essential to have a deeper understanding of the divergent nationalism manifested among the rival Eritrean political groups. They are also important to comprehend the position of the Ethiopian state in the period which highly influenced its relation with Eritrean groups.

Another useful framework to understand this study is Collaboration theory. Although it discussed and emphasized more on European imperialism and an Afro-Asian collaboration to it, Robinson's Collaboration theory pretty much explains the Ethiopian government's relation with Eritrean political groups and elites during the federation years. After the 1950 UN federal

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Barrington, *op cit.*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *The Emperor's Speech on the Reunion of Eritrea, op cit.*

resolution, attaining the helm of authority of the Federal government, the Imperial Ethiopian government was engaged in securing the service of loyal Eritrean subjects and created a collaborating class in Eritrea.

Robinson mentioned the importance of domestic elites for the success of imperialism. He indicated:

Imperialism was as such a function of its victims' collaboration. Without the voluntary or enforced cooperation of the governing elites, economic resources could not be transferred, strategic interests protected or xenophobic reactions and resistance to change contained. Nor without indigenous collaboration, could European have conquered and ruled their non-European empires. From the outset that rule was continuously resisted; just as continuously native mediation was needed to avert resistance or hold it down.¹⁹

Although the Ethiopian government's position could not be compared with an imperialist power in the federation years, throughout the period the Ethiopian government utilized the service of key Unionist elites to facilitate its gradual takeover on Eritrean autonomy which at the end led to the annexation of the territory into the Ethiopian empire. The cooperation of these elites was also vital in suppressing the anti-unionists opposition that came due to the Ethiopian government's violation of the Federal Act. The role and activities of the two Eritrean Chief Executives and the Commissioner of the Eritrean Police epitomize the collaboration of Eritrean elites with the Ethiopian government during the federation years.

The occupation of territory made the collaborative equations much easier. Robinson noted: "with government support in their hands proconsuls could make better bargains with indigenous elites and enforce them. They were also able to manufacture a small modern elite of collaborators and set them in subordinate authority."²⁰ The presence of the Office of the Emperor's Representative in Eritrea helped the successful accomplishment of Ethiopian policy in Eritrea. The creation of close relationship between the office of the Emperor's Representative and the executive branch of the Eritrean government was a clear indication of this. Throughout the federal period, the Eritrean leadership apparently operated as a subordinate to the Crown's representative and acted upon the will and order of this office.

¹⁹ Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe, (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 118-120.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Rewarding loyal elements and taking punitive measures against those non-cooperatives assures the continuity of the collaborative mechanism. In explaining the rewards that collaborators would get for their services, Robinson stated:

Incentives and rewards for its collaborators were partly commercial but mainly governmental - the perquisites of office, honors, contracts, social services and all the favors that could be given or taken away through its administrative land, fiscal and education policies. The rulers distributed them with the object of keeping the weightier part of the dependency's political elements on the government side. Their opponents' tactic, whether they came as at first, from traditional, or later, from modern elites, was to play on grievances and draw this same weightier part into non-cooperation or resistance against colonial rulers.²¹

In the Eritrean case this was manifested in terms of rewarding loyal subjects with attainment of high government posts, awarding of traditional titles, ranks and promotions; and sometimes it involved cash allowances as in the case of the Assembly members. Many members of the Eritrean Assembly received the so called "salary of the humble" from the imperial palace. This was secured only if they were operating in accordance to the will of the palace. Furthermore, every principal appointment to a position in the Eritrean government was under the direct control and order of the Office of the Emperor's representative. Preserving one's position or assuring new appointments were guaranteed only if the elites were willing to live in an agreement with the Emperor's Representative.

Collaboration theory is often described as a policy of divide and rule. This is because, "earlier experiences justified that the rule was possible because ruled subjects were socially divided and could not unite."²² Practically, in the Eritrean case, the social and political division of Eritreans during the 1940s and 1950s well served the interest of the Ethiopian government. Eritreans fought against each other as Unionists and anti-unionists belonging to antagonistic ethnic and religious groups. There was no consensus among them on what constituted the Eritrean nation. With such divisions they were not able to defend the autonomy they had in the federation. Emperor Haile Selassie was able to dismantle this institutional arrangement precisely because there was no unified nationalist movement within Eritrea in the period.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 134.

1.8 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of six chapters. I have attempted to keep the coherence of the thesis in a chronological presentation. The thesis begins with a chapter that examines the political conditions in Eritrea during the decade that preceded the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation. As a background discussion for this study, the chapter shades light on the most important factors that influenced the course of Eritrea's future following the collapse of the Italian colonial state. It explains why Eritreans developed separate identities which led to the emergence of sectarian politics. It also discusses the role of external forces in deciding Eritrea's political future and how the local and international debates on the Eritrean issue culminated with the UN federal decision of December 1950. Eritrean political groups of the 1940s constituted the core of the first Eritrean Assembly, hence, looking at the party politics of the British period is vital as it provided the background and continuity to the main theme of this research.

The challenge encountered in drafting the Eritrean Constitution, which laid the foundation for the formation of the Eritrean government in the Federation, and the way the Eritrean Assembly constituted with the 1952 elections are the prime focuses of chapter three. The Ethiopian government's staunch position to give Eritrea as little space as it could in the federal arrangement is discussed in this chapter. This chapter also addresses the Assembly's consideration, the debate and adoption of the draft Eritrean Constitution.

Chapter fourth deals with the first Eritrean Assembly and the emergence of the Federation. It looks how the Assembly, composed of Unionists and anti-unionists, was operating in the early years of the Federation. It tries to assess how members attempted to protect Eritrea's autonomy when the Federal (Ethiopian) authorities and the Eritrean leadership were reluctant to respect the Federal Act and the autonomous status it gave to Eritrea. It also considers the change in the Eritrean government leadership and how this gave pace to the dismantlement of the federation.

The rapid deterioration of Eritrean autonomy under the second Chief Executive of the Eritrean government, Asfaha Woldemikael, and the second Eritrean Assembly's role in the process are the main emphasis of chapter five. The chapter screens the 1956 elections for the second Eritrean Assembly. The elections and the end result had a decisive influence on the Assembly's action and performance. The chapter tries to answer why the Assembly became feeble. It also looks at Eritrean resistance to Ethiopian hegemony developed outside of the Assembly circle.

The final chapter is concerned with the third Eritrean Assembly and the dissolution of the Federation. It discusses the way the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation was terminated and the role of the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean Assembly in the process. It addresses the way the Ethiopian government opted to end the federal arrangement and the pressure on the Eritrean Assembly both from the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean public.

Chapter Two

A Prelude to the Federation: A Survey of Political Conditions in British Eritrea

Introduction

To understand the genesis of the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation and conceptualize the trajectories that led to its emergence, it is essential to examine the political conditions in Eritrea following the defeat of the Italians in 1941. This chapter is about the most important factors that influenced the course of Eritrea's future following the Italian colonial rule. By identifying the major forces of local politics, I will review the political divisions in Eritrean society and the development of separate identities and sectarian politics in the period. I will also briefly consider the role of Ethiopia and the international debates on Eritrea and how it shaped the Eritrean question.

2.1 Ethno-religious Composition of Eritrea

In addressing the post-Italian era political dynamics in Eritrea, it is essential to present a brief overview of the Eritrean communities especially for understanding the sectarian nature of the period's politics. This is mainly because several of the political developments that ensued after the collapse of the Italian colonial state are highly intertwined with the makeup of the Eritrean communities.

Like many African countries Eritrea is a colonial creation. Since its political formation in 1890 by Italy, the country is a cultural mosaic of nine distinct ethno-linguistic groups. The Afar, Blin, Hidareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Tigre, Tigrinya and Saho constitute Eritrea's society. This classification is made based on linguistic, ethnic and territorial differences of the communities. However, many of these groups have a long history of commercial and political interaction, intermarriage, and shared cultural characteristics, particularly the two largest ethnic groups: the Tigrinya and Tigre, who together make up over 80 percent of the population.¹ There is also a close relationship between the genealogy of the Saho and the Afar and the Kunama and the Nara.

¹ Dan Connell and Tom Killion, *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*. 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md., and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2011), p. 4. The United Nations Commission for Eritrea (1950) put this figure about 78 percent. For a detailed discussion on Eritrean ethnic groups see Redie Bereketeab's "Supra-Ethnic Nationalism: The Case of Eritrea," *African Sociological Review*, 6, 2, 2002.

On January 1, 1890, the various ethnic groups were brought together to form Italy's first colony in Africa, the political entity of Eritrea.

The usual terms used in analyzing the social and cultural composition of the Eritrean society are the 'highlanders' and the 'lowlanders'. In terms of way of life, the country is roughly dichotomized between largely pastoralist and Muslim lowlanders and largely agricultural and Christian highlanders. In contrast to this general lowland/highland division, within the ethnically and linguistically diverse lowlanders, Islam has provided a framework of cultural unity for lowlanders, while Christianity had this function in the highlands.

Linguistic Diversity in 1950s Eritrea (U.N. Commission for Eritrea)²

	Highland	Red Sea (Eastern Lowland)	Western Province	Total	%
Tigrinya	387,000	-	9,000	396,000	46.7
Tigre	-	29,000	243,000	272,000	32.08
Saho	63,000	7,000	-	70,000	8.25
Blin	-	-	37,000	37,000	4.36
Afar	-	28,000	-	28,000	3.3
Other³	-	-	45,000	45,000	5.31
Total	450,000	64,000	334,000	848,000	100.00

In terms of religious structure, the Eritrean society is more or less evenly divided among Christians and Muslims. The great majority of Tigrinya people are Christians. Most of them belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, with a few Catholics, Protestants and a minority of Muslims, the *Jeberti*. The Tigrinya inhabits the highland (*Kebesa*) regions of *Hamasien*, *Seraye* and *Akele-Guzai*. The Tigre, who reside in the western lowlands and along northern coastlines (*Metahit*) of Eritrea, are mainly Muslims, but there are a few Christians among them. The Blin are predominantly Muslim pastoralists on the Western plateau. The Saho are mainly Muslim pastoralists in Eastern and southwestern lowlands. The Afar, also known as Danakil, inhabit the

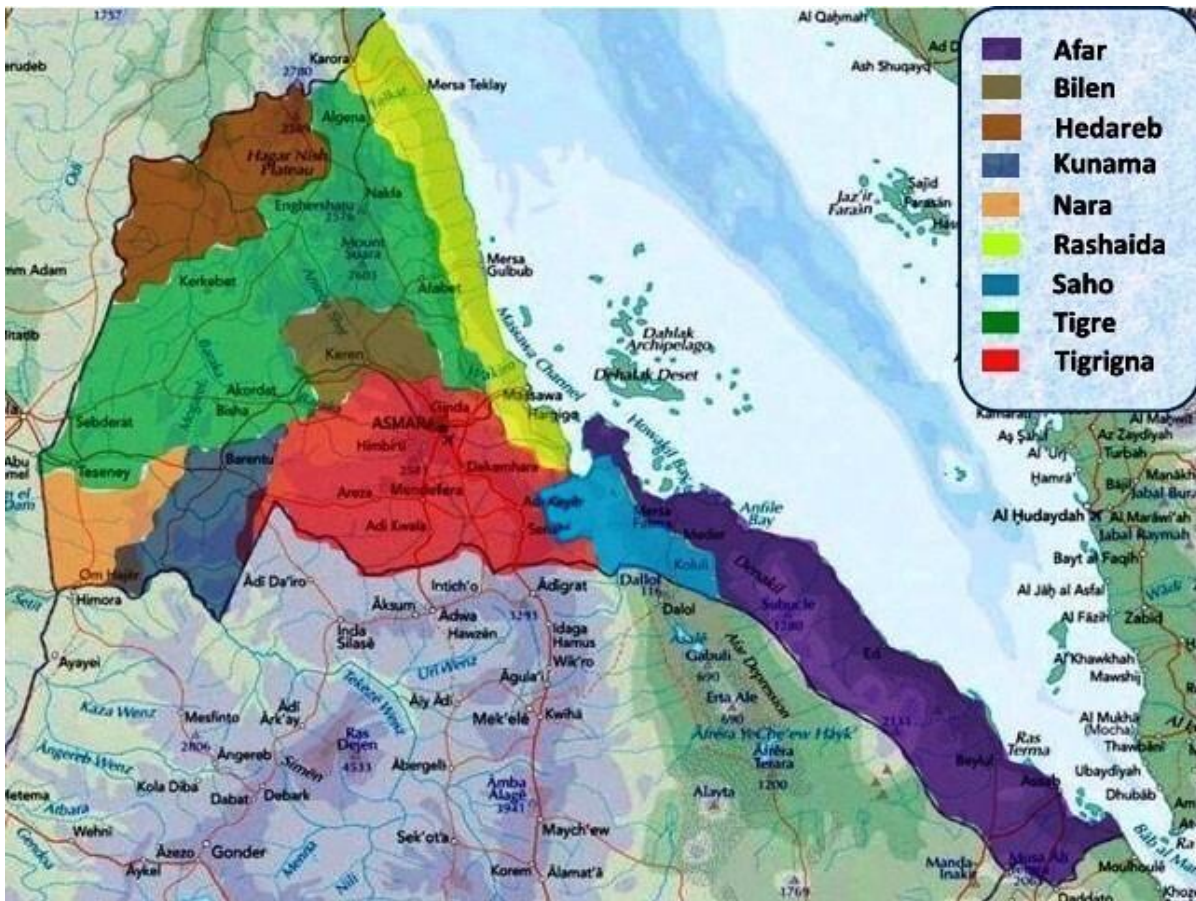
² United Nations, *The United Nations and the Independence of Eritrea*. (New York: UN Department of Public Information, 1996), p. 63.

³ The 'Other' category refers to the Hidareb, Kunama, Nara and Rashaida ethnic groups.

eastern and southeastern lowlands. They are all adherents of Islam. The Kunama, who inhabit the Gash-Setit area, are agro-pastoralists. They mainly practice traditional religion but have a few Muslims and Christians. The Nara are Muslim sedentary agriculturalists. Rashaida are a small group of Arabic speaking Muslim pastoralists.⁴

The Tigrinya group in the highlands has maintained close cultural and economic ties with their linguistic brethren in Ethiopia's northern province of Tigray. They shared myths, historical memories and socio-cultural affinity. These ties have had an important impact on Eritrea's history as it was this longstanding ethno-cultural relationship used by Ethiopia in its attempt to control Eritrea since 1941.

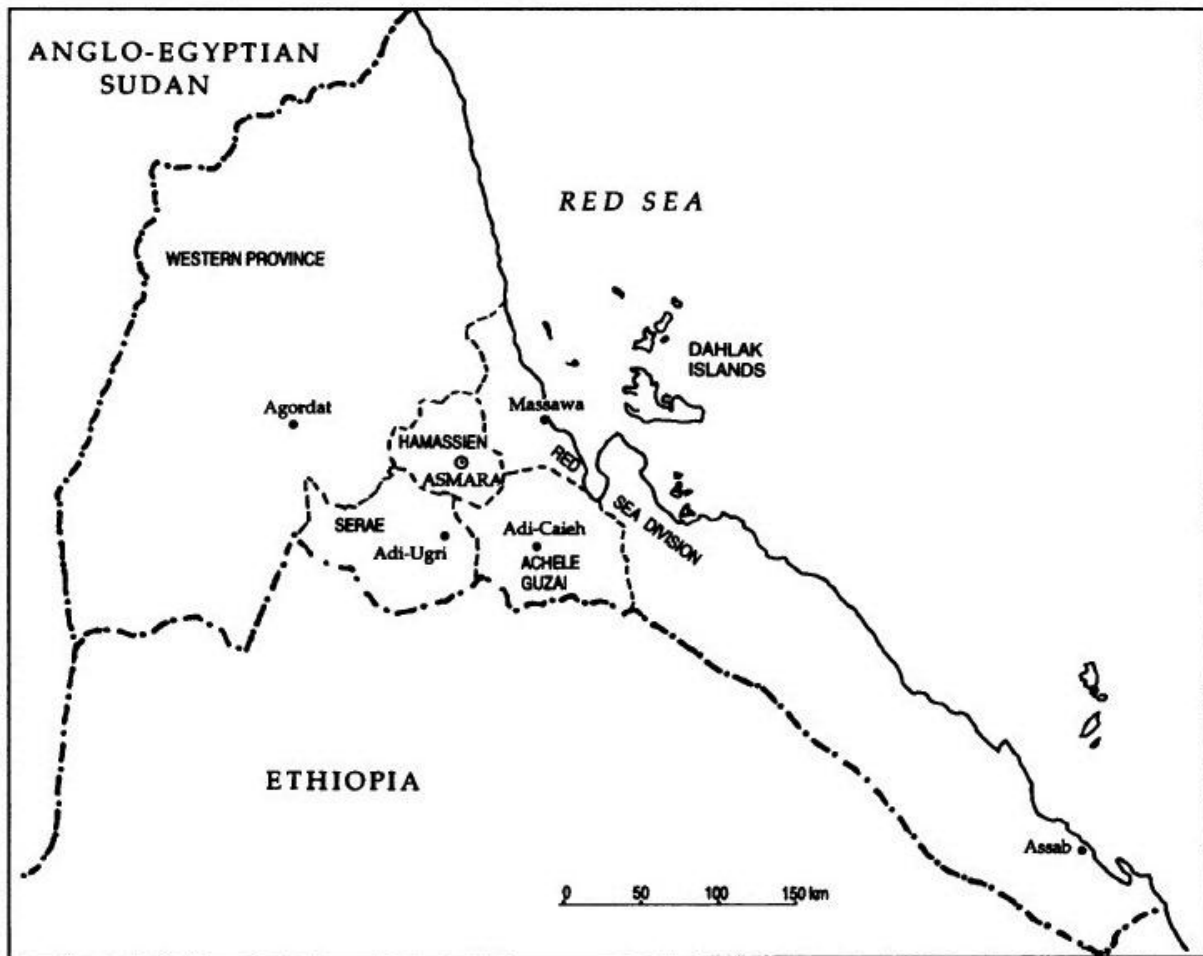
Location of the Ethnic Groups of Eritrea



Source: s1.zetaboard.com/anthroscape/topic/4973582/10/

⁴ Alemseged Abbay, *Identity Jilted or Re-Imagining Identity? The Divergent Paths of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalist Struggles*. (Lawrenceville, NJ, The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1998), p. 23-24. See also Araia Tseggai, "The Economic Viability of an Independent Eritrea" (Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1981), p. 55; Connell and Killion, *op. cit.*, pp. 337, 391.

The Provinces of Eritrea in 1950



Source: Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea; New York 1950

2.2 The Coming of the British and the Emergence of Sectarian Party Politics in Eritrea

Unlike the case in many African countries, the more than half a century long Italian colonial rule in Eritrea came to an end with the British-led allied powers' victory over the Italians in East Africa in April 1941.⁵ Consequently, Eritrea was occupied by the British and remained under what is known as the British Military Administration (BMA) until September 1952. The defeat of Italy did not result in either the immediate transformation of the territory into a trusteeship or

⁵ Italy first got a foothold in Eritrea in 1869 with the acquisition of a land in Assab. Italy's territorial occupation continued till the beginning of 1890 and Eritrea was formally declared the first Italian colony on January 1, 1890. Italian Colonialism in Eritrea came to an end in April 1941.

full independence. Following the defeat of Italy the British were entrusted with the responsibility of administering the country as caretakers of occupied enemy territory.

Throughout the British Administration period (1941-1952) the fate of Eritrea was a much contentious issue. A tense and occasionally violent struggle took place over the future of the country. The contest was mainly fought among Eritreans who held different visions regarding their country's future ranging from complete independence to unity with Ethiopia and UN trusteeship. The issue was precipitated and exacerbated by the involvement of external actors. Ethiopia claimed Eritrea belonged to it before the Italians took it in the 19th century colonial partition of Africa and should be incorporated into its empire. The British favored the partition of the country between Ethiopia and their colony of the Sudan. Italy, which left a big settler community in Eritrea, was pressing initially for the return of its former colony and later for trusteeship and an independent Eritrea. And the victorious Allied powers of World War II were primarily guided by the dictates of their own national interest.

The Lack of Distinctive Postcolonial Eritrean Identity

While discussing the nature of post-colonial identities Mbembe noted: "the post-colony is made up not of one coherent 'public space', nor is it determined by any single organizing principle. It is rather a plurality of 'spheres' and arenas, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with their logics when operating in a certain specific context: hence the post-colonial 'subject' has had to learn to continuously bargain and improvise." Faced with this, he argues, the postcolonial 'subject' mobilizes not just a single 'identity', but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly 'revised' in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required.⁶

The Eritrean experience was a vivid illustration of Mbembe's argument. In the wake of the sudden collapse of Italian colonial rule there were concrete political realities and perceptions that provoked societal divisions relating to the control of the state. The period thus witnessed the emergence of two main camps, highly influenced by ethnicity and religion. The main issue of contestation was the political future of the country and the commanding position one would

⁶ Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (eds.) *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1996), p.1.

attain in the new setting. Hence, two diametrically opposite political desires emerged regarding the question of what should the fate of Eritrea be and who had the right to represent Eritrea in deciding its future.

At this critical moment the ethnic sentiment that had appeared less important under colonial rule began to emerge and provoked societal divisions. As Trevaskis, one of the British Administrators of Eritrea, portrayed it:

The most combustible material caught fire first. The structure of Eritrean political unity, erected during the Italian regime, had concealed the fundamental conflicts of culture and interest among the Eritrean communities. The Italian regime had had the effect of anaesthetizing the passions dividing them and had lent the lie of Eritrean unity a semblance of truth. With the passing of that regime this anaesthetic effect wore off; and in the sharp climate of wartime and, even more, of post-war Eritrea, sensibility, long numbed out never destroyed, began to return.⁷

The multifarious nature of the society has much to do with this. The 'material equipment and modern services far ahead of usual colonial standards'⁸ which the fifty years of Italian rule brought to Eritrea did not lead Eritreans to develop a distinct identity cutting across geography, religion and ethnicity. As Weldeab Weldemariam, one of the senior politicians of the 1940s also expressed it: "the Eritrean Communities lived always separately even after the country was united by Italians in 1889 and have never lived under a government of their own together for at least four hundred years. In other words, the two communities are still strange to one another."⁹ It appears clear that in post-Italian era Eritreans did not develop a solid identity that could embrace their diversity.

Eritreans during the BMA thus, 'imagined'¹⁰ their community in different ways. The Eritrea that the majority of peoples of the lowlands imagined was not the same Eritrea that the majority peoples of the highlands imagined. Research increasingly shows that the period was a time of considerable redefinition of identity for many reasons. The decade of the British period, thus, witnessed a dramatic growth of politics on ethnic and religious grounds.

⁷ G.K.N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition 1941-52*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 109.

⁸ Stephen Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945) p. 132.

⁹ Alemseged Abbay, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, New Left Books, 1991).

Party Politics on Ethnic and Religious Grounds

The first Eritrean organization free of ethnic and religious connection was the *Mahber Fikri Hager* (MFH) (Association to the Love of Country). The association was established following the British occupation of Eritrea on May 5, 1941, by Eritrean leaders and elders. The objective of this organization was to communicate Eritrean wishes to the BMA and end to Italian domination over Eritreans. Its leadership and membership embraced both Muslim and Christian nationalists from different regions across the country who shared anti-Italian platform. The continued presence of Italian colonial administrators in many official posts, the strengthening of their land and property holdings in Eritrea, the post-war economic crisis that weakened Eritrea's new export industries and rising urban unemployment were all concerns shared by the various sectors and regions. These issues served as bonds for unity among urban and rural elites who viewed the presence of foreigners as the source of economic, social and political problems.¹¹

Through time regional, religious and ethnic factionalism emerged within the MFH which threatened its very existence. The close association of MFH with the Ethiopian Coptic Orthodox Church and the growing tendency of its leaders towards the Ethiopian state threatened to leave Muslim lowlanders a minority in the Ethiopian empire. Kinship, religion and provincial interests which had been submerged in the anti-colonial coalition re-emerged, setting the stage for the fragmentation of Eritrean political parties.¹²

The involvement of Ethiopia in the Eritrean politics cemented the suspicion among Eritreans to one another. After the Italians left Eritrea, Ethiopia was demanding the incorporation of Eritrea to its empire. Muslim lowlanders, who had much weaker cultural and historical ties with Ethiopia than those of the highland, saw this as a clear danger for them. Thus, they were more clearly opposed to the unity of Eritrea with Ethiopia than were the Christian highlanders. They perceived that the Christian-dominated Ethiopian state would favor the Eritrean Christian highlanders and feared unity with Ethiopia would further tip the scale of economic and political power to the advantage of the Christian highlanders. Equality for them would be more easily achieved in an independent Eritrea. Many Christians, on the other hand, favored the Ethiopian

¹¹ Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 65.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

connection, as a guarantee of their own political predominance in Eritrea and supported the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia. The Unionists' hatred and fear of the return of Italy in any form to Eritrea was also deepened their Ethiopian connection. In both camps this was mainly promoted by the political and religious elites.

The political choices made by the main social and political groups were not unrelated to their own material interest. In the new setting the common goal was to secure maximum access to the power of the state and the resources it commands. As a temporary care taker Administration, the British were not to stay long in Eritrea. The deep seated desire of the anti-colonial elites and their members were to appropriate the resources controlled by the colonizing power. In another word, it was to regulate on its behalf, Eritrean land, labor, trade and business and reconstitute itself as the new dominant power. The members, however, were unable to produce a coherent leadership in the context of an independent Eritrean state. They were divided essentially into two major camps – the unionist and the anti-unionists. The Muslims saw independence as the most promising setting for the achievement of that goal, especially since any link with Ethiopia was for them a serious political disability. Most Muslims fear they would fare badly in a Christian dominated Ethiopia unless their rights were officially recognized. Their demands included legal recognition of Islam and its institutions including the Sharia and the use of Arabic language in schools and for official purpose. Conversely, Christians believed that a link with Christian Ethiopia guaranteed their political supremacy in Eritrea.¹³ The leaders in both camps, thus, engaged in mobilizing their followers by what Therborn called *mobilization by revival and anticipatory hope* and *mobilization by anticipatory fear*.¹⁴

In October 1946 the BMA allowed the formation of political parties and encouraged the institutionalization of political activities in Eritrea. By this time the MFH, which was working as a clandestine movement, had fragmented and only its name existed. Two factions were created within the MFH. One was looking for political union of Eritrea with Ethiopia and the other

¹³ John Markakis, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26, 1, (1988), p. 51-54. See also Tekle M. Woldemikael, "The Cultural Construction of Eritrean Nationalist Movements," in Crawford Young (ed.), *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-State at Bay?* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 190-191.

¹⁴ *Mobilization by revival and anticipatory hope* is mobilization of a given society or group on the basis of the past, of what has existed, of past experiences, values, symbols, and so on. Whereas, *mobilization by anticipatory fear* refers to presenting the future as an imminent threat flowing from current or past tendencies. For discussion on this see Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*. (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1980), pp.115-123.

avored independence for the country. On November 23, 1946 the two factions convened at *Bet-Ghiorghis* in Asmara to settle their differences. The reconciliation effort was not successful. The failure of the *Bet-Ghiorghis* meeting signaled the end of MFH as anti-colonialist association. This was followed by emergence of political parties on the basis of regional, ethnic and religious lines.

Through legalization of organized political activities and formation of political parties, the BMA created an atmosphere in which Eritreans might have the voice in determining their political future. Consequently, from the end of 1946 through the arrival of the UN Commission in February 1950, there was flurry of political activity in Eritrea. Although initially five political parties were formed which in time became splintered and re-emerged as other parties, the same two main groups could be distinguished along geographical and religious boundaries: the pro-independence lowland Muslims versus the irredentist highlands Christians. However, attachment with one or another political party was not observed strictly on geographical or religious grounds. In the highlands, a small number of Orthodox saw no advantage in Eritrea's incorporation into Ethiopia and thus formed a pocket of pro-independents. On the other hand a small nucleus of Muslims mostly chiefs and landed aristocracy favored union with Ethiopia due to their feudalistic hold on the larger number of Tigre serfs.¹⁵

Following the formation of political parties, the major parties who claimed the support of the overwhelming majority of the population came to be the Unionist Party and the Muslim League. These parties had complete and irreconcilable differences. The main dividing line was their respective position and viewpoint regarding the future status of the country. The Unionist Party, dominated by highlanders, made vigorous demands for immediate and unconditional union of Eritrea with Ethiopia. The Muslim League dominated by lowlanders, rejected any union and agitated for independence through trusteeship.

The Unionist Party which was formally established on January 1, 1947 depicted Eritrea as a geographical, historical and cultural extension of Ethiopia. It called for unconditional and immediate union of Eritrea to Ethiopia. The Party stressed on historical ties and cultural identity

¹⁵ Lloyd Ellingson, "The Emergence of Political Parties in Eritrea, 1941-1950," *The Journal of African History*, 18, 12, (1977), p. 281. See also F. E. Stafford, "The Ex-Italian Colonies," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944)* 25, 1, (January 1949) p., 49.

of Eritrea to Ethiopia. The Party concentrated its power base and political organization among Christian population of the Eritrean highlands, mainly among the Tigrinya ethnic group. But it is also worth mentioning that it also gained the support of a few Muslim *Jeberti*¹⁶ merchants and members of the aristocratic classes of the Western lowlands.

The party had the full support of Ethiopia and its leaders openly claimed Eritrea belonged to Ethiopia. Tedla Bairu, president of the party, vividly articulating the Ethiopian nationalism of the Unionists, said: "We are Ethiopians, but we have been apart from our country for more than sixty years."¹⁷ Among Unionists Ethiopia was affectionately referred to as "Motherland". The party's propaganda reiterated salvation for Eritreans was only through union with 'mother' Ethiopia.¹⁸

While unionism was getting momentum in the highlands and strong support from the Ethiopian state, Ibrahim Sultan, an anti-unionist, established the Muslim League (*Al-Rabita Al-Islamiya Al-Eritriyya*) on December 4, 1946.¹⁹ The Party was established in reaction to the growing aggressive Ethiopian nationalism of the Unionists. Its membership was heavily drawn from Islamic regions such as the Western Province, Massawa and the Red Sea districts. This party, which opposed any form of associating with Ethiopia, rallied many ethnically and linguistically diverse Muslims under the banner of Islam, making religious identity an essential component of nationalist aspirations.

Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan expressed that the triggering point to his decision of forming the Muslim League was directly related to the incident at *Bet-Ghiorghis* meeting. He decided to form *Al-Rabita* after having heard humiliating and disdainful words of a Unionist activist to those who did not comply with them (Muslims). According to Ibrahim Sultan Christian groups dominated the discussion of *Bet-Ghiorghis* meeting. When after several hours of discussion he decided to leave the meeting he was asked to express the opinion of Muslims. He refused to comment expressing he himself and some of the Muslims in the meeting did not represent the entire Muslim community. Hence, he called upon an arrangement to be made for another meeting in which other delegates from the Muslim communities could be invited. In the meantime a

¹⁶ The *Jeberti* are a minority Muslim community among the Tigrinya speaking group of the Eritrean highlands.

¹⁷ Mesfin Araya "Eritrea, 1941-52, the Failure of the Emergence of the Nation-state: Towards a clarification of the Eritrean Question in Ethiopia," Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, The City University of New York, 1988, p. 179.

¹⁸ Trevaskis, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁹ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

Unionist young man among those convened echoed: "...A horse leads a thousand mules. We [Christians] are the horse and they [Muslims] are the mules, they should accept whatever we decided."²⁰ *Sheikh* Ibrahim then left the meeting to draft the program of the Muslim League.

In explaining on the choice of an Islamic name to his party he said:

We Muslims were not happy at *Bet-Ghiorghis*. Hence, I thought of forming a party that can oppose Ethiopia... I have drafted a program for *Al-Rabita* and circulate it to thirty-two mosques in Asmara. I choose this name [*Al-Rabita Al-Islamiya Al-Eritriyya*] because it is the only way which can unite all the Muslim communities and enlist their service to our cause. With a liberal name like *Independent Party* we would attract neither the nomads nor the village farmers. However, we did not resort this name to isolate our Christian brothers. To secure the support of our Christian brothers who stand by our cause we have formed the Liberal Progressive Party that has its base in the Christian highlands.²¹

On the other hand, the political atmosphere in Eritrea was well manipulated by Ethiopia. Throughout the political debate and discourse on the fate of Eritrea, the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, claimed the incorporation of Eritrea to his empire. Hence, he manipulated the Eritrean politics to influence the course of the political events. Before the official opening of the Ethiopian Liaison Office in Asmara in 1946, the Emperor used to send several key Eritrean figures operating in his Empire to Eritrea. The main mission of these Eritrean officials of the Ethiopian government was to propagate for the union of Eritrea with Ethiopia.²² In 1944 through the Ethiopian Minister of Pen, the Emperor organized the formation of a pro-unionist Eritrean association in Addis Ababa, the *Society for the Unification of Eritrea with Ethiopia* (SUEE). Through this organization he infiltrated the BMA and the MFH and the Eritrean politics and enlisted the service of political and religious elites who had a tendency towards union with Ethiopia. Besides, after 1946 through his personal liaison officer, Colonel Nega Haile Selassie, in Asmara, the Emperor was able to influence and finance the Unionist Party.²³ The pervasive

²⁰ RDC/IW/0001/Acc. No. 07948, *Interview with Ibrahim Sultan*, Cairo, 1977. The name of the interviewers are not mentioned. Square bracket added.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Some of Eritrean officials of the Ethiopian government sent during 1941-1942 to Eritrea were *Blatien Gieta* Lorenzo Tae'zaz, *Blatien Gieta* Ephrem Teweldemedhin, *Blatta* Dawit Uqbazghi, *Dejazmach* Ghebremeskel Habtemariam, *Blatta* Kflezghi Yihdego, *Fitewrari* Abraha Weldetatis and *Bitwedded* Asfaha Weldemichael. For detailed discussion on the involvement of Ethiopia on the Eritrean politics see Alemseged Tesfai, *Aynfelale 1941-1950. [Let us not Apart]* (Asmara: Hdri Publishers, 2002), pp. 84-94.

²³ Mesfin, *op. cit.*, p. 232. See also Alemseged Tesfai, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-119; Jordan Gebre-Medhin, *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea: A Critique of Ethiopian Studies*. (Trenton, New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1989), p. 82.

Ethiopian nationalism in the highlands, its anti-Islamic and anti-colonial manifestations were effective instruments for the Emperor.

One way of ensuring the support of the broad masses of the Christian highlands to the Ethiopian and Unionists' cause was to secure the service of the Orthodox Church in Eritrea. Even before the formation of the SUEE and its infiltration into Eritrean politics the Emperor had gained the support from the Eritrean clergy. Thus, from 1942 onward the Eritrean Orthodox Church, under the leadership of the archbishop *Abune Marqos*, was enlisted to this service. The Bishop led the movement of Eritrean union with Ethiopia and persistently worked for it.²⁴ The Church's position can be partially explained that under Italian rule, all the fiefs of the church were declared state land and thus the church's social influence on Eritrean society was almost completely eliminated. Furthermore, the BMA rejected the petition of the Bishop for the return of the land. Henceforth, the clergy were convinced that restoration of the church's past could only be achieved through a union of Eritrea with Ethiopia.²⁵ As Trevaskis noted:

By 1942, every priest had become a propagandist in the Ethiopian cause, every village church had become a center of Ethiopian nationalism, and popular religious feast days such as 'Maskal' (the Feast of the Cross) had become occasions for open displays for Ethiopian patriotism. The cathedral, monasteries, and village churches would be festooned with Ethiopian flags and the sermons and prayers would be delivered in unequivocal political language.²⁶

The Bishop became an ardent supporter of union with Ethiopia and was threatening his followers with ex-communication unless they became Unionists. They would not get Church services for the burial of their dead nor the weddings of any of their immediate relatives, nor were they entitled to Holy Communion.²⁷ The Church was in the forefront of the struggle with its formidable ideological influence in the highlands. Linking politics to the social and spiritual life of the ordinary people, the Church forced many people to the Unionist cause. The effect of what was a declaration of ex-communication on a traditionally religious society was considerable.

²⁴ Connell and Killion, *op. cit.*, p. 411; see also Markakis, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²⁵ Okbazghi Yohannes, *Eritrea, A Pawn in World Politics*. (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1991), p. 56.

²⁶ Trevaskis, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

²⁷ Alemseged Abbay, *op. cit.*, p. 32. See also Ellingson, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

In the highlands, the Liberal Progressive Party which was calling for the independence of Eritrea objected the involvement of the Church in political affairs and maintained a secular political activity. The party opposed the Church's role in fomenting religious rivalry.

In contrast to the Unionist view, the Muslim League perceived Eritrea as a territory with predominantly Muslim population both demographically and geographically. According to the Party, Eritrea was composed of two-third Muslims with their own distinct culture. The Party's ideological mobilization stressed the historical, religious and linguistic distinctiveness of Eritrea. The Muslim League, thus, categorically rejected historical or cultural ties with Ethiopia.²⁸

The leaders constantly invoked memories of obliteration of the lowlands by Ethiopian Christian kings and nobility in the past. Referring pre-colonial memories a memorandum of the Muslim League declares: "swarms of Ethiopians used to raid this country, at regular intervals, and kidnap women and children to trade in them and have them as slaves...take away the people's property and cattle and leave them in the claws of poverty only to die of starvation...set fire to their houses and mosques..."²⁹

The Muslim League perceived union with Ethiopia as a blow. The discriminatory ethnic policy in Ethiopia was repeatedly emphasized as a warning against any attempt for union. And the leaders constantly reminded their followers of the unfavorable social conditions of Muslims under Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia. The Muslim League outlining its objections to any association to Ethiopia wrote:

The reasons that make us decide to reject union with or annexation to the Government of SHEWA (Ethiopia) are the differences in race, language, religion and history which all repulse any political union of ours with it, especially after Islam had penetrated to its interior. This had moved each of the two countries to do its best to preserve its independence and characterizing features as a result of the fighting that continued in Ethiopia in the past, particularly in the zones inhabited by the Mohammedans.³⁰

Furthermore, mentioning the influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church over the Government of Ethiopia in creating inequalities among Ethiopian Muslims and Christians, the Muslim League

²⁸ In its memorandum submitted to the Four Powers commission the Muslim League claimed that Muslims represented two-third of the Eritrean population and occupied almost nine-tenth of its area. *Memorandum from the Eritrean Muslim League to the Body of the Board of Inquiry of the Big Four in Eritrea*, Asmara, November 10, 1947, p. 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

in its memorandum to the Four Powers Commission explicitly argued its anticipatory fear in case of any form of association of Eritrea with Ethiopia.

The bad conditions of the Muslims there can be very clearly observed from the constitution of the present government of Ethiopia. A Muslim does not have the right to be equal to a Coptic Ethiopian or to fill an administrative vacancy of any nature. A government that goes ahead under such religious influences to this extent cannot be allowed to rule over the lands of others, and if progressive civilization is being entrusted to civilized countries, that have taken the obligation to protect the high principles of life and social justice, then it is their DUTY not to throw away the people of this country to the feet of Ethiopia.³¹

In their respective attempts to capture the population and broaden their support, the leaders of the Unionists and anti-unionists alike from the start provoked ethnic and religious sentiments and traditional hostilities. Both parties had religious leaders at their disposal. The Unionists had *Abune Marqos*, the archbishop of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The anti-Unionists, specifically the Muslim League, had Seyid Abubakar³². In addition, both movements had their respective youth organizations, *Andnet*³³ belonged to the Unionist Party and the Muslim League had the *Shaban Al-Rabita*³⁴ which promoted their respective organizations' activities.

The Resort to Violence

The dispute between the antagonistic groups led, in the end, to physical force and violent actions. In the heydays of the period, violent clashes between the Christian and the Muslim communities were a frequent phenomenon. Conflicts were most intense in the urban centers such as Massawa, Keren, Asmara, and Adi-Ugri, where the rival groups came into more frequent contact and increasing competition over scarce resources – jobs, education and business.³⁵ In its political

³¹ Ibid, pp. 10-11.

³² Although he had a nominal position in the Muslim Leagues' activities, Seyid Abukakar, the head of the Eritrean branch of the *Tariqa Khatimiyya* (a Muslim brotherhood), was a honorary President of the Muslim League.

³³ The *Andnet*, formed in September 14, 1945, was most radical and uncompromising in its demands for unconditional union with Ethiopia. See Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia the Federal Experience*. (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1997), p. 40. In the 1949 Eritrea Annual Report, the British authorities mentioned "the avowed aims of these youths were terroristic, and their continuance as an association was a threat to law and order. The *Andnet* was therefore declared illegal and dissolved on April 6, 1949. Their President and Vice-president were sentenced to 15 and 10 years imprisonment respectively." See RDC/His/Bri/Box 108/Acc. No. 01654, F. G. Drew, *Eritrea: Annual Report for 1949*. p. 6.

³⁴ The *Shaban Al-Rabita* is responsible to organize demonstrations, mass organizations, distribution of pamphlets, booklet, leaflets etc. and dissemination of the party's objectives through campaigns. See, Nebil Ahmed, "A History of Al Rabita Al Islamiya Al Eritrea (1946-1950)," in Tekeste Melake ed. *Proceedings of A Workshop on Aspects of Eritrean History*. (Asmara: Hdri Publishers, 2007), p. 138.

³⁵ Mesfin, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

agitation the Unionist Party did more than issue of propaganda. The Party's leadership was highly aggressive. It engaged in frequent demonstrations and terrorist activities. The summer before the arrival of the UN Commission in November 1947 saw unprecedented political violence as the main parties strived for support. Political violence against prominent pro-independence personalities was not a rare occurrence. In June and July 1947, several bomb incidents occurred in Asmara and there were attempts on the lives of *Dejatch* Hassan Ali, a leader of the Muslim League and Weldeab Weldemairam leader of Liberal Progressive Party and editor of the Tigrinya newspaper, *The Eritrean weekly News*.³⁶ On March 30, 1949, AbdelKader Kebire, President of the Muslim League's Asmara branch, was assassinated by a Unionist Youth League terrorist organization. He was gunned down on the eve of his departure to attend a UN discussion on Eritrea at Lake Success, New York.³⁷

The Unionists' aversion of Italian support³⁸ to the pro-independent factions is another factor for violent activities of the Party. In its annual report for the year 1949 the British Administration mentioned that the Italian interference in local political affairs caused a growing wave of acts of political terrorism. The report mentioned "certain supporters of the Union with Ethiopia Party were so exasperated by the Italian efforts, which included distribution of money that they resorted to violence in an utterly misguided attempt to frighten the Italians off." According to the report, by the end of November 1949, nineteen Italians and two Eritreans, all supporting Eritrean independence, had been murdered.³⁹

A few days after the arrival of the United Nations commission of inquiry, on February 14, 1950, inter-ethnic violence escalated. In Asmara and its surrounding areas a three-day (February 21-23)

³⁶ Ellingson, *op. cit.*, p. 268. Between 1947 and 1953 Weldeab survived seven assassination attempts on his life and was finally forced to leave Eritrea in 1953.

³⁷ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

³⁸ Although Italy renounced its 'right' over her former colonies in the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, she did not abandon the ambition of getting them back in some form or another. Italy who had a big settler communities (around 55,000) with influential career or financial interest in Eritrea strongly objected the incorporation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. For this purpose by March 1947 it created an organization called Il Comitato Rappresentativo Degli Italiani in Eritrea (CRIE). The organization's primary objective was to work towards the achievement of an Italian trusteeship over Eritrea and to oppose the unification of Eritrea with Ethiopia. Afterwards, Italy was cooperating with the *Independence Bloc*, a coalition of several pro-independence Eritrean political parties formed in 1949 to counter the Unionist Party. For further discussion of Italy's involvement see Shumet Sishagne, *Unionist and Separatists: the Vagaries of Ethio-Eritrean Relation 1941-1991*. (Hollywood: Tsehai Publishers and Distributers, 2007), pp. 64-70. See also Tekeste Negash, "Italy and Its Relations with Eritrean Political Parties, 1948-1950," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, Anno 59, No. 3/4 (September-December 2004), pp. 417-452.

³⁹ RDC/His/Bri/Box 108/Acc. No. 01654, *Eritrea: Annual Report for 1949*. p. 5.

bloody inter-ethnic confrontation took place. According to the UN commission report, the immediate cause of the riot was a throwing of a bomb by a Unionist activist near the headquarters of the Unionist Party, at the funeral procession of a Muslim who was opposed to Unionists and who had been murdered the previous day by a gang of *Shifra* (political terrorists).⁴⁰ Reporting the first day of the violence, *The New York Times* reported: "sword-wielding Moslems and Christians clashed in a bloody riot today. Incomplete casualty figures indicated at least eleven dead and fifty wounded, and fighting still raged at 10 o'clock tonight." Muslim shops and markets stalls were set on fire. Reports of total casualties put the figure about 50 dead and 130 wounded. *The London Times* describe the violent clashes as: "... emotional religious motives... displacing political beliefs as the cause of differences and civil disorder." A state of emergency was declared in the native quarters of Asmara. It took five days to restore order.⁴¹ The riot was finally put to an end at the intervention of religious leaders. According to Ibrahim Sultan both camps called the intervention of their respective leaders, *Abune Marqos* and *Mufti Ibrahim Mukhtar*, in ending the violence.⁴²

Rural inter-ethnic violence was also a lingering problem. Mostly throughout the 1950, there were several incidents of clashes between Muslim Tigre and their Christian counterparts from Hamasien and Seraye regions in the highlands, and between Muslim Saho and their Christian neighbors in Akele-Guzai. There were frequent assaults on the *Jeberti* in the highlands. The only parts of Eritrea to which the violence did not spread were the remote extreme areas such as the northern highland and the Danakil lowlands.⁴³

⁴⁰ RDC/His/UN/Box 116/Acc. No.01784, *Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea*. General Assembly Official Records: Fifth Session, Supplement No. 8 (A/1285), Lake Success, New York, 1950, p. 29.

⁴¹ Ibid. see also Mesfin, *op. cit.*, p. 190. For details on these clashes see Alemseged Tesfai, *op. cit.*, pp. 437-449.

⁴² RDC/IW/0001/Acc. No. 07948, *Interview with Ibrahim Sultan*, Cairo, 1977.

⁴³ Trevaskis, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

Funeral Procession of the Muslim-Christian Conflict (February 1950)



Source: The Research and Documentation Center Archives

The British were favoring the partition of Eritrea and the incorporation of the Western lowlands of the country into their colony of the Sudan. Thus, they were active in manipulating the division in the society. The British officials were more than eager to foment ethnic tensions and conflicts. They organized armed Muslim militia from the lowlands on the pretext of self-defense of the Muslims against the Christian attacks. In the event of Muslim/Christian confrontations, official security measures were also negligent.⁴⁴ They were also fomenting Tigraian nationalism in the highland region of Eritrea by stressing the ethnic and religious connections among the highlanders and those people living in the Ethiopian province of Tigray, and even considered the idea of creating a Tigraian entity federated with Ethiopia.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Mesfin, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-234.

⁴⁵ Okbazghi, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.

External involvement in Eritrean politics only served to exasperate ethnic chauvinism and conflicts. Ethiopia's role intensified the Muslims' fear of joint Christian Eritrean/Ethiopian threat in the realm of culture, politics and economics. To counteract the increasing Ethiopian support for the Unionists the leaders of the opposition forces first espoused British trusteeship and later forged an alliance with Italy. On the other hand, particularly the involvement of the Italians increasingly fed into the anti-Islamic and anti-colonial nationalism of the Unionists.

2.3 The International Debate on Eritrea and the UN Federal Decision

The contest over the future of Eritrea was not a solitary game battled among local forces. It was equally contested first among the victorious powers of World War II and later at the United Nations. The international debate on the fate of Eritrea and the other former Italian colonies of Libya and Somalia were initiated formally in 1945. A council consisting of the foreign ministers of Britain, France, the USA and the USSR held its first meeting in London in September 1945. The USA proposed a UN collective trusteeship for ten years followed by independence; this was opposed by Britain. The USSR preferred individual trusteeship and expressed its desire to administer Tripolitania. Meanwhile France proposed the return of Italy to its former colonies as an administrative power.⁴⁶

The future of the former Italian colonies was first considered in detail at the Paris Peace Conference in February 1947, when Italy renounced all her rights to Eritrea, Libya and Somaliland. The Peace Treaty decided that the final disposition of these territories should be jointly determined by the "Big Four" - USA, USSR, Britain and France - which should determine the final disposition of these territories within one year after the enactments of the Treaty. If disagreement was noticed between these powers in the year limit, "the question was to be referred to the General Assembly of the United Nations."⁴⁷

The lack of agreement among the Council of Foreign Ministers compelled the four countries to send the Four Powers Commission of Investigation to the ex-colonies to hear the wishes of the inhabitants themselves. Accordingly, the Four Powers Commission visited Eritrea from November 8, 1947 until January 3, 1948. In those early years of the cold war no agreement was

⁴⁶ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ RDC/Greenfield's Collection, *A Substantial Extract (pp. 8 to 32 end) from a United Nations Publication on Eritrea/Ethiopian Federation* (apparently suppressed on publication or shortly thereafter, 1953), p. 8.

reached on the future of Eritrea. Besides, they encountered a population divided between supporters of union with Ethiopia and proponents of independence for Eritrea. The Four Powers reported that the population was divided with a slight majority opting for independence and the rest for union with Ethiopia.⁴⁸

Apart from the deep division among the local forces regarding the future of the country, the 'national' interests of the 'Big Four' were aimed at either maintaining or expanding their colonial possessions or, in the cause of emergent superpowers (USA and USSR), establishing new bases and alliances. Britain's interests were to ensure the economic well-being of its two colonies, British Somaliland and the Sudan. Its proposal was to partition Eritrea between Ethiopia and the Sudan and restore the Ogaden region of Ethiopia to Somalia. France sought to maintain the colonial status quo and to prevent precedents of early independence for its colonies in the Horn of Africa and the Maghreb. American and Soviet efforts focused more on competition to establish footholds in areas vacated by Italy as well as replacing Britain as the paramount international power in the Horn.⁴⁹ The common denominator that made the fulfillment of these externally motivated goals possible-partially or wholly- was Ethiopia's desire to incorporate Eritrea. These various international interests were accompanied by equally disparate goals of the Eritrean nationalist factions whose visions of Eritrea were shaped by different socio-historical experience.

Throughout the international debates on the future of Eritrea (1945-1950), the Government of Ethiopia insisted that its historical claims over Eritrea should be given particular importance. The Ethiopian Government argued that, "since Eritrea was an integral part of it for thousands of years", the only just solution to its claim would be to incorporate Eritrea into its "Motherland".⁵⁰ Ethiopia's claims on Eritrea were submitted both at the conference of the Council of Ministers of the Four Powers and, later at the General Assembly of the United Nations. The claim was on the basis of ethnic, geographic, and historical grounds. Ethiopia argued that Eritrea didn't constitute

⁴⁸ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 62-64, see also Tekeste, *Eritrea and Ethiopia...op. cit.*, p. 43-44.

⁴⁹ For detailed discussion on the national interest of the Four Powers on the Eritrean question see, Okbazghi, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-88.

⁵⁰ Eyassu Gayim, *The Eritrean Question: The Conflict Between the Right of Self-Determination and the Interests of States*. (Uppsala: Iustus Forlag AB, 1993), p. 262.

a political unit until it was carved out from her territory in the course of the late 19th century colonial expansion and baptized 'Eritrea' by Italy.⁵¹

By stressing the ethnic and historical affiliation, Ethiopia associated the highland people of Eritrea with that of the people of Tigrai. In this claim, Ethiopia argued, both Tigrai and Eritrea enjoyed a common language, *Tigrinya*, and it was probable that the Tigrinya-speaking people lived in the same region for more than 2000 years.⁵² Besides, Ethiopia also claimed Eritrea in favor of an outlet to the sea. The Ethiopian fear of foreign aggression, using Eritrea as a platform, was coupled with the claim for an outlet to the sea as a guaranteeing factor for the survival of the country. This point was in fact frequently made before the UN in that body's endeavor to resolve the fate of Eritrea.⁵³ In the debate on the fate of Eritrea, Ethiopia took an active part in the General Assembly's discussions through its Foreign Minister Aklilu Habteweld.

The debate on the disposal of the former Italian colonies, which lasted from 1945 to 1948, did not yield a unanimous solution among the Four Powers. Therefore, as agreed among these powers earlier, the matter was referred to the General Assembly of the United Nations for a final solution. The UN began its deliberations on Eritrea on September 21, 1948 following the report of the Four Powers Commissions report. On May 13, 1949, the First committee recommended to the General Assembly that "Eritrea, except the Western Province be incorporated into Ethiopia". This recommendation was rejected by the general Assembly, whose members demanded more information about the wishes of the population before moving forward.⁵⁴

During April, 1949, the UN again agreed to vote on another disposal plan presented to it by the British and Italian Foreign Ministers, the *Bevin-Sforza deal*. According to this plan, Eritrea was to be partitioned. The highland parts of Eritrea including Massawa and Assab were to be united with Ethiopia and the Western Province to be incorporated into the Sudan. The UN initially

⁵¹ Andargachew Tiruneh, "Eritrea, Ethiopia and Federation (1941-1952)," *North East African Studies*, 3, 2, (1981), p. 105.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

⁵³ Fredric, R. Sherman, *Eritrea in Revolution*. (London: University Microfilms International, 1980), p. 57.

⁵⁴ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

voted in favor of the partition plan. Nonetheless, due to the disagreement on other components of the deal – the partition of Libya– the *Bevin-Sforza* deal was at the end rejected as a whole.⁵⁵

After the demise of the *Bevin-Sforza* plan, a coalition of several political parties calling for the independence of Eritrea was formed under the name of *Independence Bloc*. The Bloc opposed any union with Ethiopia and called for immediate independence of Eritrea. It was led by Ibrahim Sultan and had the backing of the Italian government.⁵⁶

In its Fourth regular session on November 21, 1949, the General Assembly passed resolution 289 (IV) and decided to send a commission to Eritrea in order to investigate the wishes of the people. The commission consisted of representatives from five countries: Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan and the Union of South Africa. The Commission opened its office in Asmara on February 15, 1950 and conducted public and private meetings with Eritrean individuals and parties between February 24 and April 5, 1950. It also conducted hearings and fieldtrips to various parts of Eritrea and consulted the British Authorities.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, differences of opinion among the members of the Commission prevented it from reaching a unanimous conclusion. Members of this commission held different views regarding Eritrea's future, ranging from complete independence to incorporation with Ethiopia. Norway proposed the incorporation of Eritrea in to the Ethiopian empire. Burma together with the Union of South Africa recommended that Eritrea be constituted a self-governing unit of a federation with Ethiopia, under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown. The representatives from Guatemala and Pakistan recommended that Eritrea be given complete independence after ten years of UN Trusteeship mandate.⁵⁸

When it conducted its Fifth session the General Assembly debated the Eritrean question at length. A heated discussion developed regarding the future of Eritrea. The US used its influence to push its draft resolution and come up with what was described as a 'compromise' formula. It

⁵⁵ Tekeste, *Eritrea and Ethiopia... op. cit.*, pp. 45-46. The Bevin-Sforza deal was named after those who drafted it, British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin and his Italian counterpart, Count Sforza.

⁵⁶ RDC/His/Bri/Box 108/Acc. No. 01654, *Eritrea: Annual Report for 1949*. p. 6. The Independence Bloc was formally established on July 25, 1949. It encompassed the Muslim League, the Liberal Progressive Party, the Pro-Italy Party, Italo-Eritrean Association, the War Veterans Association, the Association of Intellectuals, the National Party, and the Independent Eritrea Party.

⁵⁷ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 64; *The United Nations and the Independence of Eritrea. op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ *The United Nations and the Independence of Eritrea. op. cit.*, pp. 9, 84.

provided for the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. At last, after a stormy session, the General Assembly adopted, on December 2, 1950, the American initiated 'federal' formula by 46 to 10 with 4 abstentions.⁵⁹

Resolution 390 A (V) which called for the establishment of a federal union between Eritrea and Ethiopia, recommended that Eritrea should constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown; the Eritrean Government was to possess legislative, executive and judicial powers in the field of the domestic affairs; the federal government was to control defense, foreign affairs, currency and finance, foreign and interstate commerce and external and interstate communications including ports. During the transition period ending not later than 15 September 1952, an Eritrean Assembly would be chosen by the people and an Eritrean constitution prepared and put in to effect. A UN commissioner, in consultation with the administering authority, the Governments of Ethiopia, and the Eritrean people, was to prepare a draft Eritrean constitution to be submitted to the Eritrean Assembly.⁶⁰

The UN 'Federal' resolution, which was mostly described as an imposed decision of external powers on Eritrea, was the result of a failure of consensus among three sets of competing forces for power: the rival and antagonistic domestic groups, Ethiopia which was claiming unconditional union of the territory to its empire and the international powers who considered the Eritrean question through the lenses of their national interest. But as its basic proposition, the proposal presupposed the existence of ethnically and religiously based political division within Eritrean society and was decided at the height of the political turmoil and societal confusion. It was, as the UN Commissioner Anze Matienzo, aptly put it, a 'middle-of-the-road plan' a compromise plan which should give satisfaction both to those who had wished independence and those who had desired union with Ethiopia. He also welcomed the fact that the plan gave satisfaction to Ethiopia by recognizing her claim for an outlet to the sea.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁰ RDC/His/Fed/Box 121/Acc. No. 01892, *Resolution Federating Eritrea to Ethiopia Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 2 December 1950*.

Conclusion

Ethnicity and religion were at the center of Eritrean politics of the British era. They shaped the perception, and ideology of competing social and political forces and external intervention in the local politics as the case of Ethiopia. During the 1940s the politicization of ethnic ideology was more visible and more articulated in the bitter debate between the Unionists and anti-unionists on the fundamental question of what constituted the Eritrean nation itself. Having aimed at securing maximum access to the power of the state the Eritrean society was polarized into two opposite directions. While the Muslim League and its followers with an anticipatory fear for union with Ethiopia rallied for the independence of Eritrea the Unionists endeavored for unity with Ethiopia with the revival and anticipatory hope. Both the Unionists and anti-unionists operated under their respective assumptions. And when the perceptions were dearly held by their followers they easily transformed into a political force. This bred the development of sectarian politics in Eritrea that at some stage involved violent clashes among the supporters of the two camps.

Parallel to this the international politics and the clash of national interests among the victorious powers of World War II also impacted on the Eritrean question. The lack of consensus on the Eritrean question among the Four Powers and later at the United Nations coupled with the claims of Ethiopia made the Eritrean issue a complicated matter. The UN federal resolution was, therefore, a compromise settlement of the local, regional and international debate on the future of Eritrea.

Chapter Three

Establishment of the Federation and Formation of the First Eritrean Assembly

'I insist on the full return of Eritrea to Ethiopia'¹
Emperor Haile Selassie to John H. Spencer

Introduction

The decade that saw the cleavage of Eritreans on the very notion of what constituted the Eritrean state and the country's future came to a conclusion in December 2, 1950 with the UN federal resolution. Chapter two highlighted the local and international political dynamics that led the UN Federal decision. Following this decision, groundwork was undertaken to lay the foundation of the federation.

This chapter deals with the major problems experienced during the drafting of the Eritrean constitution, which was the basic pillar for the establishment of the new Eritrean government within the Federation. I will examine the position of the Eritrean political groups, the Ethiopian government and the role of the UN Commissioner in the process of drafting the constitution. I will also look at the way the Eritrean Assembly was erected and at its consideration and adoption of the draft Eritrean constitution.

3.1. Drafting the Eritrean Constitution: The Challenges

On December 14, 1950, to assist the implementation of its Federal resolution on Eritrea, the UN General Assembly appointed Mr. Edwardo Anzi Matienzo of Bolivia to become UN Commissioner in Eritrea. The main duty of the Commissioner was, in consultation with the Administering Authority (the British Administration), the Government of Ethiopia and the inhabitants of Eritrea, to prepare a draft of the Eritrean Constitution which was to be based on the principles of democratic government; include the guarantees contained in paragraph 7 of the Federal Act;² and contain provisions adopting and ratifying the Federal Act on "behalf of the people of Eritrea." The Commissioner had also a duty of submitting the draft constitution to the

¹ Michela Wrong, *I Didn't Do It For You: How the World Used and Abused a Small African Nation*. (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 170.

² The first seven articles of the UN federal resolution regulating the relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia are known as the Federal Act.

Eritrean Assembly and of advising and assisting the Assembly in its consideration of the draft constitution. And finally the duty of approving the constitution as adopted by the Eritrean Assembly.³

Matienzo arrived in Asmara on February 9, 1951, and on the same day made a public statement in which he explained his terms of reference, describing the UN resolution as a middle-of-the-road plan. He urged Eritreans irrespective of party or creed to accept the UN decision. Shortly after his arrival in Eritrea, he undertook a series of personal visits throughout the territory, extending over a period of eleven weeks, from the end of February to the middle of May 1951. His purpose was to acquaint himself with the country, its people and their aspirations and to explain to as many Eritreans as possible the meaning of the UN resolution and his tasks.⁴

The commissioner began his duty by preparing a constitution for Eritrea, and one of the first things he did was preparing a detailed explanation of UN Resolution 390 A (V). For many Eritreans the Commissioner's document entitled *Detailed Examination of the General Assembly Resolution of December 2, 1950, on the Future of Eritrea* which was prepared in Tigrinya and Arabic, was the first detailed look at the UN Resolution and what it represented. The document set out the meaning of the UN resolution and lawful formation of an Eritrean Government which defined a status of Eritrea assuring the maximum autonomy attainable.⁵

In his method of consultation with the inhabitants, the commissioner adopted a system to hold meetings with each group of public opinion at the headquarter in Asmara, alternating with meetings in the divisions to hear the people. First of all invitation to meetings on specific dates were sent to all political parties, religious leaders and heads of the foreign communities. Secondly, the inhabitants were notified of the dates and places of hearings in each division.⁶

The Eritrean Democratic Front (EDF)⁷, formerly known as the Independence Bloc, expressed the wish to be heard as a single group. The Unionist Party preferred to be heard in the various

³ RDC/Box 32/Acc. No. 00681/*Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea*, General Assembly Official Records: Seventh Session, Supplement No. 15 (A/2188), New York, 1952, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13. The representatives were nominated according to the traditional system of the country and the mass of the people were heard through their appointed representatives.

⁷ On December 31, 1950 a peace conference, initiated by the Independence Bloc and backed by a section of the Unionist Party, was held in Asmara at the *Empero* Theater. In the Peace Conference, as a gesture of its acceptance of

districts. Highly influenced by their respective previous ideologies, the main Eritrean political groups, the Unionist Party on the one hand and the Muslim League and the EDF on the other, were at odds on their interpretation of the UN resolution and opted to march in different directions in the new setting.

The UN Commissioner held various discussions with the political parties, religious leaders and foreign communities on questions such as should there be one or two assemblies? For what period should the assembly or assemblies be elected? Of what should the Eritrean Executive consist? How should it be nominated? What should be the relations between the Executive and the Assembly? Should the Emperor of Ethiopia be represented in the Executive and should he take part in constituting the government? What should be the official languages of Eritrea? Should Eritrea have a special flag? and the like.⁸ The view of the political parties and religious leaders were divided on these issues.

The EDF asked for two assemblies: a senate and a house of representatives, opposed to the Ethiopian Emperor being represented in the executive or even having a representative in Eritrea. The main Muslim political parties asked for Arabic and Tigrinya as the official languages of Eritrea. The Unionists favored a single assembly, and that the Emperor's representative be given certain powers, ranging from extensive to more formal functions. They favored Tigrinya only, claiming that Arabic was a language used only for religious purposes and foreign to the territory. Owing to the position taken by the majority of Christians regarding the Arabic language, there was a marked hardening in the attitude of Muslims. Though they had at first proposed Arabic and Tigrinya as the official languages, they subsequently rejected Tigrinya.⁹

There was similar cleavage of opinion on the subject of the flag. The EDF asked not only for a distinctive flag for Eritrea, but also for separate flag for the federation. The Muslim League of Western Province (splinter group from the Muslim League), the Independent Muslim League and other parties recognized that the federal flag should be that of Ethiopia, but claimed that

the federal plan, the Independence Bloc changed its name to the Eritrean Democratic Front. Renouncing its initial agitation of calling for Eritrea's independence, the Bloc claimed to be the guardian of Eritrea's autonomous status within the federal arrangement.

⁸ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

Eritrea should have a flag of her own. The Unionist Party, opposed the creation of a separate Eritrean flag, which it considered contrary to the spirit of the federation.¹⁰

During the consultations, throughout the provinces of Eritrea, Matienzo discovered that the views expressed by the people were the same as those already expressed by the political parties. The most controversial issues involved the designation of the flag, the number of assemblies, official languages, and the representation of the Emperor. The people also explicitly expressed their desire that the United Nations should guarantee the Eritrean constitution and that a permanent UN observer should be placed in Eritrea to oversee its autonomy.¹¹

The UN resolution directed the commissioner to conduct consultations with the government of Ethiopia as well. Of all the consultations the commissioner held, these were the most contentious. The Government of Ethiopia chose to interpret the UN resolution in a way different from the UN Commissioner's, the EDF's, and even different from some segments of the Unionist Party.

The Commissioner opened his formal consultation with the Government of Ethiopia, in Addis Ababa, on May 28, 1951. In his first official meeting with the foreign minister of Ethiopia, Aklilu Habteweld, Matienzo realized the Ethiopian interpretation of the resolution. Aklilu informed the Commissioner that under the resolution the Emperor would be represented in the Eritrean government. According to Aklilu, the representative should have the power to nominate the head of the Eritrean government or to approve his appointment and to nominate the ministers, to say the enactment of the laws by the Eritrean Assembly, to veto laws passed by the Eritrean Assembly, and to confirm the appointment of judges. Added to this, Ethiopia should have the right to run Eritrea's school and health facilities. The Foreign Minister also demanded that the Ethiopian government be declared the federal government and that Amharic be designated Eritrea's official language.¹² In his draft report Matienzo mentioned that the proposal of the Ethiopian government on establishing its representative in the Eritrean government caused some surprise for him. The UN resolution made absolutely no provision for such a step.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. See also RDC/Box 20/Acc. No. 14312/*Progress Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea During the Year 1951*.

Matienzo's discussions with the Ethiopian government officials convinced him that Ethiopia was planning to treat Eritrea as one of its provinces and not as an "autonomous unit" recommended by the UN.¹³ In a conversation with the American Ambassador Childs in Addis Ababa, the Commissioner vowed that he would oppose the Ethiopian government on its interpretation of the UN resolution and, if need be, he would convene a panel of legal experts to advise him on the disputed paragraphs.¹⁴

Ethiopia's interpretation of the first two paragraphs of the Federal Act was different from those of the Commissioner. In this regard Matienzo noted:

The provisions of paragraph 1 and 2 of the Federal Act were clear. They established an autonomous unit and then enumerated the power which the Eritrean Government would possess. But those provisions must be considered together with paragraph 12 of the resolution, which provided that the constitution of Eritrea should be based on democratic principles. Hence the powers of Eritrea must necessarily originate directly or indirectly from the Eritrean people and could not be established by another authority; for otherwise it would be possible to impair Eritrean autonomy. Autonomy would, in fact, disappear if the central power were exercised through its agents, whether they were called provincial governors, prefects or district chiefs. In that case autonomy would merely be set aside in favor of one of the systems of decentralization found in unitary States.¹⁵

Matienzo was indeed entrusted with a difficult task. The UN resolution itself was complex because Eritrea was treated both as an autonomous entity within the Ethiopian empire and an entity federated to Ethiopia. For the Ethiopian authorities, through the federal resolution Eritrea had become united with Ethiopia and it had to be treated as other provinces of the empire. The lion's share of power which the federal resolution bestowed on Ethiopia had a role in influencing the Ethiopian interpretation of the resolution.

Matienzo at last gave in to two major Ethiopian demands. Primarily, against the advice of his panel of legal experts, he agreed not to take the issue back to the UN over disagreements on interpretation with Ethiopian authorities. He also agreed to give a substantive position for the Emperor's representative in the Eritrean constitution. The memorandum of the Ethiopian foreign minister, Aklilu to his Emperor provides us with a plausible explanation of the shift in

¹³ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴ United States Government, Department of State, Childs to Secretary of State, Memo, June 2, 1951:775 006-151. In Tekie Fessehazion, "A Brief Encounter with Democracy: From Acquiescence to Resistance During Eritrea's Early Federation Years," *Eritrean Studies Review*, 2, 2, (1998), p. 25.

¹⁵ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Matienzo's position. In his memorandum Aklilu swanked how he threatened Matienzo with the loss of his position if he pressed the issue against Ethiopia's interpretation of the resolution. Aklilu in threatening the Commissioner in this words:

Your appeal to the United Nations and to the court will be completely useless because we can tell you right now that if you succeed in having your interpretation accepted, you will succeed at the same time in having accepted your resignation and the end of you being treated well...your would be persona non grata and it would be necessary to open question again of finding someone to replace you. In any case you would lose, and your fine position would be liquidated in a week.¹⁶

With a change of government in his native Bolivia, Aklilu knew Matienzo had fallen out with the new regime. Hence, the Commissioner was anxious whether he would have a job after his Eritrean mission. The Ethiopian Foreign Minister, thus, skillfully exploited Matienzo's insecurity to the Ethiopian advantage. He boasted in his memorandum that the warning had its desired effect and Matienzo complied to Ethiopia's demand that the issue would never go to the UN.¹⁷

However, even after he had given in to the demands of the Ethiopian government, Matienzo nevertheless continued to warn the Ethiopian government that public opinion in Eritrea indicated a preference for real autonomy, not the curtailed version the Ethiopian government was considering. He said that the strongest impression which he had received had been that the people unanimously accepted Federation, with a strong feeling for Eritrean autonomy. It would be dangerous to alter the meaning of the resolution to imply anything other than real autonomy. He warned that "any limitation on Eritrea's autonomy might be the spark which touch off fresh disturbances." And said "there are no degrees of autonomy. It either exist or disappeared."¹⁸

Even though the Commissioner agreed that the emperor could have a representative in Eritrea without powers, but with official functions, the idea of a representative even without powers was strongly opposed in Eritrea. The Muslim League informed the Commissioner that it would "oppose energetically certain interpretations of the United Nations resolution which, should they materialize, would surely and rapidly reduce Eritrea to a status of vassalage and domination by

¹⁶ United States Government, Department of State, Mulcahey to Secretary of State, June 1952. Quoted in Tekie Fessehatzion, "A Brief Encounter With Democracy..." *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Progress Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6, and 25.

Ethiopia."¹⁹ Among the nine points of concern the Party submitted to the Commissioner were: An absolute autonomous Eritrean Government; the federal government must not be confused or identified with the Ethiopian Government; no representative of the Emperor within the Eritrean Government; that the presence of the Emperor's representative would categorically be rejected; that Arabic along with Tigrinya should become Eritrea's official languages.²⁰

By the time Matienzo was conducting his final consultations with Ethiopian authorities on the third draft of the constitution, between late March and early April 1952, Ethiopia had won huge concessions. The UN commissioner incorporated into the constitution articles dealing with the Emperor's representative that ranged from the merely honorific to the substantive. The UN commissioner decided to confer on the Emperor's representative the power of reconsideration of legislation passed by the Eritrean Assembly.²¹ Spencer, the American advisor to the Emperor, argued that due to be split down the middle between Muslim lowlanders and Christian highlanders, Eritrea's future Assembly would struggle to pass legislations. According to him, granting a Crown representative a role would stabilize this volatile mix. He also claimed, in return to the appointment of the Emperor's representative's in Eritrea, Ethiopia conceded the right of Eritrea to have its own flag and accepted Tigrinya and Arabic as Eritrea's official languages.²²

The post of the Emperor's representative in Eritrea was not a matter provided in the UN resolution. However, in the process of drafting the Eritrean constitution Ethiopian authorities insisted on installing a representative of the emperor in Eritrea. Although Matienzo gave some concessions to Ethiopia, he stood firm in some aspects that provided some space for Eritrean autonomy. Spencer admits the difficulties encountered by the UN Commissioner in drafting the constitution for Eritrea were essentially of Ethiopian origin. He noted that the constitution which was 'unsatisfactory to the Ethiopian government was a tribute to Matienzo's very considerable diplomatic skills.'²³ Speaking of the Emperor's central aspiration Spencer echoed:

¹⁹ RDC/Acc. No. 01755, *Memorandum of the Moslem League in Eritrea to Commissioner of United Nations for Eritrea*, H. E. Eduardo Anze Matienzo, Asmara, 10 October 1951, p. 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-80.

²² John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia At Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Selassie Years*. (Algonac, Michigan: Reference Publications, Inc., 1984), pp. 245-246. Spencer was an American who served as international legal advisor to Emperor Haile Selassie government through four decades. He had been recruited in 1935. During the federation implementation years he was the one of the most active negotiators representing the Ethiopian government.

²³ Ibid., p. 246.

The Ethiopians did not want federation of any kind, they never believed in any of it. The Emperor really pushed our hands, he was all for taking Eritrea immediately. He said, 'I insist on the full return of Eritrea to Ethiopia.' I told him, 'No, you have to ease into it, you can't grab it all at once. Even if you want nothing to do with the Federation, you will have to slide into it gradually, bit by bit.'²⁴

The Emperor's position was clear and mainly focusing on creating as little space as he could for Eritrean autonomy, and the understanding of the UN resolution was as something that restored Eritrea to its ancient 'Motherland'.

The Eritrean public followed the discussions on the resolution and the draft constitution through newspapers. The Unionists used their newspaper, *Etiopia*, to argue the cause of closer union with Ethiopia. The paper's position was merely rehearsing the views expressed by Ethiopian authorities. The anti-union forces pushed for a strong autonomy and a literal interpretation of the UN resolution through their organs. Throughout the period of the implementation of the UN resolution the EDF's Tigrinya weekly, *Hanti Ertra*,²⁵ was highly engaged in raising awareness among the public on the interpretations of the resolution as a real autonomy. The paper's position was in a stark contrast to the Unionists' *Etiopia* interpretations. The Muslim League's also used its weekly *Sawt Al-Rabita* (the Voice of the Muslim League), published in Arabic. The Unionists' through *Etiopia* called for union with the 'mother country' and insisted for the emperor to have a representative in Eritrea, and for the representative to have veto power over the decisions of the Eritrean Assembly.

3.2 Elections and Establishment of the Eritrean Representative Assembly

One of the tasks which the UN resolution demand the British Administration to undertake was, in consultation with the UN Commissioner, to "make arrangements for and convoke a representative assembly of Eritreans chosen by the people".²⁶ In the light of this, the British Administration, issued a decree to establish the Eritrean Representative Assembly. The decree

²⁴ Spencer told this to Michela Wrong in an interview with her. Michela Wrong, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

²⁵ In its issue of July 4, 1951 under a heading entitled "Let the United Nations Resolution that decided Eritrea's fate be presented to the people and be described" *Hanti Ertra* provided its readership a detailed explanation of the UN federal resolution and the position of Eritrea in the arrangement. In the whole the federation implementation period these newspapers were vying to convince their respective audience on the meaning of the UN federal resolution and the position of Eritrea in it.

²⁶ RDC/Acc. No. 01892, *Resolution Federating Eritrea to Ethiopia Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 2 December 1950*, paragraph 11.

named *Proclamation No. 121*, dated 28 January 1952, reads: "There shall be convened a Representative Assembly for Eritrea chosen by the people so as to give effect to paragraph 11 of the United Nations resolution, concerning Eritrea, dated 2nd December 1950. Unless sooner dissolved, the Assembly shall continue until it has ratified the Eritrean Constitution and until the said Constitution has also been ratified by the Emperor of Ethiopia."²⁷

Accordingly, the first elections to take place in Eritrea were held on March 25 and 26, 1952, for the appointment of the Eritrean Representative Assembly.²⁸ The Assembly was chosen by a process of indirect elections, except in the towns of Asmara and Massawa, where direct elections were held. The election was supervised by the British Military Administration. The territory was - supposedly based upon social, geographical and political considerations - classified in to sixty-eight constituencies where the proportion of one representative having been fixed for about 15,000 people.²⁹

Direct elections of a single stage secret ballot were held in the towns of Asmara and Massawa. In all the other constituencies the election was carried out in two stages, primary election and secondary election. The procedure adopted in the indirect elections was that in the primary elections the various districts elected delegates to the electoral colleges. This was conducted in accordance with existing local custom. For each constituency there was an electoral college composed of at least one and not more than six delegates from each district. And at the second stage, the electoral college elected the members of the Assembly by secret ballot.³⁰ The low literacy rate in Eritrea and the nomadic way of life of some portions of the society was presented

²⁷ British Administration Eritrea, *Representative Assembly Proclamation No. 121*.

²⁸ RDC/Greenfield's Collection, *A Substantial Extract (pp. 8 to 32 end) from a United Nations Publication on Eritrea/Ethiopian Federation* (apparently suppressed on publication or shortly thereafter, 1953), p. 23.

²⁹ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36. A person shall be qualified to vote if he: (1) Is an inhabitant of Eritrea; and (2) Is not a person who possess foreign nationality and who is not descended from a parent or grandparent wholly of blood indigenous to Eritrea; and (3) Is a male; and (4) Is not less than 21 years of age; and (5) Has been ordinarily resident in the constituency for a period of not less than one year; and (6) Is of sound mind; and (7) Is not serving a term in the imprisonment. With regard to eligibility for election to the assembly, the first three conditions laid down for the electorate were repeated in Proclamation No. 121; certain other requirements, such as those of age (30 instead of 21 years) and residence (not less than two years in the constituency during the last ten years), were raised; conditions were added which disqualified undischarged bankrupts or persons whose property was subject to certain measures or who were party to subsisting contract with the Administration (unless they had disclosed the existence and nature of such contract); as regards officials employed by the Administration, they could apply for a leave of absence without pay for the purpose of furthering their candidature. Although the composition of the electorate was based on the principle of universal suffrage the exclusion of women from the electorate was one of the limitations of the election.

as the main challenge to the Administrating Authority for holding direct elections in districts other than Asmara and Massawa.³¹

The capital city Asmara was divided into seven electoral districts and Massawa into two. In Asmara, altogether eleven thousand votes were cast for contesting seventeen candidates.³² The highland divisions of Akele Guzai and Seraye were given 12 seats each and the Hamasien Division had 7. In the lowlands 23 seats were fixed to the Division of Western Province and 5 seats for the Red Sea Division.

1952 Election for Eritrean Assembly: Allocation of Seats³³

Election Method	Locality/Division	Number of Seats
Direct Elections	Asmara	7
	Massawa	2
Indirect Elections	Akele Guzai	12
	Seraye	12
	Hamasien	7
	Red Sea	5
	Western Province	23
	Total	68

The election was not fought on party lines and the procedure did not allow the political groups to directly contest for the Assembly seats. As it was made on the basis of the tribal and religious classification of the territory, many of the candidates registered themselves as individual candidates or representing their respective religion or ethnic/tribal group. The outcome of the elections thus, reflected to a great extent the impact of ethnicity and religion. There was no candidate who secured a seat in a constituency inhabited by people who professed a religion different from his own. The end result was that the Unionist Party won 32 seats, the EDF won 19, the Muslim League of Western Province 15, the National Party 1, and the Independent

³¹ N.A., *Medrekh Federeshn'n Gobeta Ertra B'Etyopian 1950-1962*. (Orota: NP, N.D.) p. 10; Alemseged Tesfai, *Federeshn Ertra Ms Ethiopia: Kab Matienso Ksab Tedla 1951-1955*. (Asmara: Hdri Publishers, 2005) p. 86.

³² Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia the Federal Experience*. (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1997), p. 74.

³³ *Proclamation No. 121 op. cit.*

Muslim League 1.³⁴ The sixty-eight member Assembly was evenly divided on religious lines and included thirty-four Christians and thirty-four Muslims.

The Muslim League of Western Province (MLWP) was a splinter group from the Muslim League formed at the end of 1949 by the patrimonial traditional chiefs (*Shimagle, Kentibay, Shum, Diglel*) of the Tigre group in the Western Province. For centuries, the broad masses of the Tigre group lived under serfdom of these traditional elites before an emancipation movement, led by *Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan* and later became the core for the formation of the Muslim League, loosen the grip of the traditional chiefs on them during the British Administration. After the formation of the Independence Bloc in 1949, these traditional chiefs who lost their absolute power over the vassalage of the Tigre people were convinced by officials of the British Administration, notably by Frank Stafford, to abandoned the Muslim League and create a breakaway movement so that their traditional authority over the Tigre would be restored. Having aimed at materializing the British plan of partitioning Eritrea between the Sudan and Ethiopia, Stafford principally convinced leaders such *Sheikh Ali Musa Radai* and *Kadi Hamd Abu Ulam* in forming MLWP.³⁵

Although most of the chiefs from this group were initially in favor of the Muslim League's political orientation, they later, suspicious of the Muslim League (Independence Bloc) attachment with Italy, abandoned this position. In a way of weakening the Muslim League, thereby attacking the Tigre peoples' serf movement and restoring their traditional authority, leaders of the MLWP made tactical alliance with the Unionists.³⁶ Unlike the Unionist or the Muslim League, however, the MLWP demanded a separate solution for the Western Province. Initially its consideration was to form an independent state by unifying the Beja groups on both sides of the Eritrean and Sudanese border. But later came to terms with the Unionist Party for the Western Province to had its own separate solution either by forming an independent state or joining the Sudan while the Unionists would then demand the unconditional annexation of the

³⁴ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³⁵ For detailed discussion on MLWP see Alemseged Tesfai, *Aynfelale 1941-1950*. [Let us not Apart] (Asmara: Hdri Publishers, 2002), pp. 430-436.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

rest of Eritrea into Ethiopia.³⁷ The harmony among the Unionists and the MLWP was mainly reflected in the Eritrean Assembly.

Election (1952): Eritreans Queuing for Electing Candidates



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/allabouteritreaanderitreans>

3.3 The Debate on the Draft Constitution, its Ratification and the Emergence of the Federation

The newly elected Eritrean Assembly, the first in Eritrea's history, convened for its first meeting on April 28, 1952. The next day the Assembly elected its chairman and deputy chairman. The alliance of the Unionists and the MLWP, which constituted two-third in the Assembly seat, outmuscled the power of the Muslim League and EDF in the Assembly. Not surprisingly, Tedla

³⁷ Lloyd Ellingson, *Eritrea: Separatism and Irredentism, 1941-1985*. (Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1986) pp. 79-80. According to the judgments of Spencer and Frank Stafford, Ethiopia would not be upset by the demands of MLWP if it secured the rest of the Eritrean territory. See Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Bairu, the Unionist leader, was elected Chairman and *Sheikh* Ali Mohamed Musa Radai, leader of the MLWP as deputy Chairman of the Assembly.³⁸

On May 5, 1952 the UN Commissioner presented the draft constitution to the Assembly and in the course of forty meetings, between May 12 and July 10, 1952, the Assembly considered and adopted the constitution of Eritrea.³⁹ Most of the articles of the Constitution were adopted without amendment and in some cases without discussion. However, a few number of controversial issues actually took a large part of the time devoted by the Assembly. One certain issue of debate was the number of Assemblies: the establishment of a single or two assemblies. The matter was later settled in favor of a single chamber.⁴⁰

The other issues of contestation were the question of official language of Eritrea, its own distinctive flag and the presence and authority of the Emperor's representation in Eritrea. Some of the debates showed parties highly attached to defending ones religious and cultural symbols or identities. Although a few among the Unionists accepted Arabic in a spirit of compromise, the majority among them favored the endorsement of Tigrinya alone as official language of Eritrea. Muslim members vied the recognition of Arabic alongside Tigrinya. A long debate ensued and the matter was settled by adopting both languages only after the members who opposed Ethiopia agreed to accept the presence of the Emperor's representative in Eritrea in return to preserve Arabic. *Sheikh* Omar Akito, from EDF, said:

We [anti-unionists] decided to leave the Assembly unless they [Unionists] agree to accept Arabic. In our part, we were rejecting the presence of the Emperor's representative in Eritrea. Gradually, the two issues developed in a sort of balancing each other. They began to propose to us 'we can accept Arabic as long as you agree to accept the Emperor's representative.' We discussed the issues and debated on it a lot out of the Assembly sessions. At the end we accepted the Emperor's representative and they accepted Arabic.⁴¹ (square bracket added)

The debate on Eritrea having a special flag in the federation, which was strongly opposed by the Unionists, was also agreed when the anti-unionist forces accepted the presence of the Crown representative in Eritrea.⁴²

³⁸ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14001/EA/ADM/ Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 3, Tuesday April 29, 1952.

³⁹ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14002/EA/ADM/ Eritrean Assembly Minutes "Eritrean Assembly First Legislature"

⁴⁰ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁴¹ Alemseged Tesfai, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

**The UN Commissioner Presenting the Draft Constitution to the
Representative Assembly (Asmara, May 1952)**



Source: *Research and Documentation Center Archives*

Assembly members who opposed union with Ethiopia understood the constitution literally as a federal document where powers of the representative of the Ethiopian government were subject to routine control. The members, at least those representing the Muslim League and EDF, were led to believe, by the UN commissioner, that the representative of the Imperial Federal Government would limit his activities to those specified in article three of the Federal Act.⁴³ However, the most significant aspect of the involvement of this representative in Eritrean affairs was that he was granted the right of veto of any legislation which he considered as encroaching upon federal jurisdiction, or as involving the international responsibility of the federation.

The final text of the Constitution, with ninety-nine articles, was adopted by the Eritrean Constituent Assembly on July 10, 1952. The Commissioner praised the spirit of compromise and understanding shown by Eritreans during their consideration of the Constitution. He declared the

⁴³ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

Constitution was an act of faith, and "its strength lies in the strength of the people's desire to respect it."⁴⁴ Surprisingly, during this time a glimpse of belief in Eritrea's self-rule was noticed among the Unionists who had more attachment with Ethiopia. Upon the ratification of the Constitution Chairman of the Assembly, Tedla Bairu said:

Through the members of the Assembly, the Eritrean people had shown their good qualities and had proved their capacity for self-government. Many people who did not know Eritrea had expressed the opinion that the Eritreans were not ready for self-government because they were insufficiently educated, and would not be able to agree among themselves. However, the Assembly had proved the capacity of Eritreans for self-government. Eritreans were very anxious to educate themselves and set an example for others.⁴⁵

Having approved its constitution the Assembly commenced its official work on July 14, 1952. A point here worth mentioning is that the Assembly undermined its legitimacy when on July 9, 1952 its members voted to extend the terms of the constitutional Assembly for a period of another four years.⁴⁶ This made the institution unconstitutional. According to Proclamation No. 121, once the Assembly ratified the Eritrean constitution new elections should be held in accordance to the clauses of the Eritrean Constitution, which the Assembly had approved. The Assembly's task was to consider and approve the constitution in accordance with the directives of the UN federal resolution. Its mandate was terminated there and then and fresh elections should be held for the establishment of a new legislative assembly. Hence, the Assembly undermined its own constitution when its members voted to sit for another four years' term. This shows that it was not a good start for the Assembly.

Soon after the adoption of the Constitution, the Eritrean Government, where power was shared between several of the political groups, was formed between July and September 1952. The Unionists commanded a majority in the Assembly by striking a deal with the MLWP. The impact of this was seen, as was the case when the Assembly convened to consider the draft constitution, on August 28, 1952 when the Assembly elected Tedla Bairu to be the Chief Executive of the Eritrean Government and his resignation from the post of chairman of the Assembly on

⁴⁴ RDC/Box /Acc. No. 01804/"Statement by the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea to the Representative Assembly of Eritrea on the Occasion of the Adoption of the Constitution."

⁴⁵ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14001/EA/ADM/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 47, Thursday July 10, 1952, Appendix B "Speech by the Chairman of the Assembly on the Occasion of the Adoption of the Constitution."

⁴⁶ Article 99 of the Eritrean Constitution reads "The Assembly responsible for adopting the constitution shall exercise the power of the Assembly as provided in the constitution for a period of four years after the constitution enters into force."

September 8, 1952 paved the way to *Sheikh* Ali Mohamed Musa Radai, who was elected chairman of the Assembly. The post of vice chairman of the Assembly also went to another Unionist *Blatta* Demsas Weldemikael.⁴⁷

The Constitution was approved by the UN Commissioner on August 6, 1952 and ratified by the Emperor on August 11. It could not enter into force, however, until the ratification of the Federal Act by the Emperor. On September 11, 1952, the Emperor ratified the Federal Act and proclaimed the emergence of the Federation.⁴⁸ Four days later the British Administration came to a formal end by handing over power to the Ethiopian authorities and the new Eritrean Government. The Eritrean government, with three branches, was created. The Chief Executive with his cabinet of six heads of departments constituted the Executive branch. The Eritrean Assembly took over the legislative function and the Judiciary was entrusted to the Supreme Court.⁴⁹ This marked the formal onset of the Federation.

Emperor Haile Selassie Crossing the Mereb River to Enter Eritrea (October 1952)



Source: *Research and Documentation Center Archives*

⁴⁷ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14001/EA/ADM/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 53, 60 and 62. Thursday July 10, 1952,

⁴⁸ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner...*, *op. cit.*, p. iii.

⁴⁹ The six departments were: Department of Social Affairs, Department of State Property, Department of Interior, Department of Finance, Department of Economic Affairs and Department of Law and Justice. Until 1959 the office of the Chief Justice was run by the Briton Sir James Shearer.

The concluding words of Matienzo carry a palpable sense of optimism and at the same time worries on the life of the Federation. Having said the necessary foundations for the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation were already laid, he noted:

So far as any document can, it [the Constitution] gives Eritrea a fair and promising start in its existence as an autonomous unit within the Federation. Much more than a mere document will be required, however, to ensure life and continuity for the institutions thus created. The Federation and Eritrea will have to learn to live side by side, each respecting the proper sphere of activity and jurisdiction of the other. As the first Panel of Legal Consultants pointed out, "the regime prescribed in the General assembly's resolution...can only operate satisfactorily if Ethiopia accepts it freely and without any unexpressed reservation, and intends to apply it in good faith". My conversation with His Majesty the Emperor of Ethiopia have convinced me that such good faith exists.⁵⁰

Leaving the life of the Federation and the existence of the autonomous unit of Eritrea to the 'good faith' of the Emperor's government, Matienzo concluded his UN assignment to Eritrea. Did that 'good faith' which convinced the UN Commissioner exist in the Emperor's government? The next chapter in some way shall deal with it.

Conclusion

The implementation of the UN federal decision encountered some tough challenges from its inception. This was mainly because the Ethiopian government's position aimed at giving Eritrea as little space as it could in the new arrangement. Ethiopia's interpretation of the UN resolution was different from the view of the UN Commissioner and Eritrean political groups with the exception of the Unionist Party. The key problem to the UN resolution was exhibited during the drafting of the Eritrean constitution when the government of Ethiopia insisted on having a Crown representative in the Eritrean government. The reluctance of Ethiopia and in some way the Unionist party to accept the idea of Eritrea having its own official languages and distinctive flag were the other dividing lines.

To the credit of the UN Commissioner's and some of the Eritrean political groups, the Eritrean constitution did materialize and this assisted the country to erect its government on democratic principles. The elections to the Eritrean Assembly, its consideration and adoption of the draft constitution thereby leading to the establishment of an Eritrean government were its initial fruits.

⁵⁰ *Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner..., op. cit.*, p. 73.

Chapter Four

The First Legislature of the Eritrean Assembly (1952-1956)

Ethiopia wanted out right annexation but accepted federation in a spirit of compromise.¹

Aklilu Habteweld

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the course of drafting the Eritrean constitution and the main problems faced during the process. It also addressed the way the Eritrean constituent assembly was set up, its consideration of the draft constitution and its final approval. In this chapter, I will address the interpretation of the Ethiopian government towards the Federation and its main course of actions resulting from its deliberations. Together with this I will assess the position of the Executive branch of the Eritrean government. In the light of the actions of Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, as the key concern of this chapter, I will appraise the role the Eritrean Assembly played in undermining and defending Eritrean autonomy during the tenure of its first legislature.

4.1 Ethiopia's View of the Federation

The above citation is a remark made by the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Aklilu Habteweld, on December 2, 1950, when the UN passed its federal resolution on Eritrea. It illustrates the nationalist ambition of Ethiopia and how it was uncomfortable with the UN resolution. It is worthy to explain a bit here the Ethiopian perception of the Federation, which highly influenced the course of its action during the federation years. The Ethiopian government perceived the federal union between Eritrea and Ethiopia not as one based on real autonomy for Eritrea, rather as a mere 'return' of the 'lost province' of Eritrea to the Ethiopian empire. Thus, right from the beginning it chose to interpret federation as union.

For the Ethiopian government, once the Federation was established the UN could no longer be involved in the relation between the two countries. The issue, in the Ethiopian understanding, was only the concern of Eritrea and Ethiopia. As John Spencer eloquently put it: "If at some time the Eritrean Assembly and Ethiopia should agree to terminate the federal agreement, the

¹ Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History*. (London: Pall Mall Press Ltd., 1965), p. 303.

Federation itself would be automatically dissolved without any possible recourse of objection by the United Nations."² This consideration was presented to the UN Commissioner during the Ethiopian authorities' consultations with him in drafting the Eritrean constitution. The response from Matienzo's international panel of legal consultants, however, was not pleasant to the Emperor's government. The position of Matienzo and his legal experts affirmed, once the Federal Act and the Eritrean constitution have come into force that "the future of Eritrea must be regarded as settled; but it does not follow that the United Nations will no longer have any right to deal with the question of Eritrea."³ Matienzo's final report stipulated that the UN resolution on which Eritrea's federation was based would "retain its full force. That being so, if it were necessary either to amend or to interpret the Federal Act, only the General Assembly, as the author of that instrument, would be competent to take a decision. Similarly, if the Federal Act were violated, the General Assembly could be seized of the matter."⁴

The practical measures undertaken by the Ethiopian government after the establishment of federation suggested that the Federation was considered a stepping stone for a complete union of the two countries. Eritrea was considered united with its motherland and as a consequence should to be treated as the other provinces of the empire. Eritrea's autonomous status was given no importance. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, a commanding officer of Ethiopia during the federation years, stated: "Nobody in Ethiopia understood or cared to understand what federation meant; most, simply thought it meant unification with Ethiopia."⁵ Asserting this point Zewde Retta, who witnessed the period, also noted in his book: "Ninety percent of the people of *Shoa* did not understand words such as federation, Federal Act, Chief Executive, it only comprehended that Eritrea was united with Ethiopia. The *Gojjam* and *Gonder* people, who are erudite in history and culture, did not hear about the Constitution [Eritrea's] and the challenge in the Administration [Eritrean], it simply pronounced 'the *Hamasiens* joined us'. The people in the other provinces

² John Spencer, *Ethiopia At Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Sellassie Years*. (Algonac: Reference Publications, Inc., 1984), pp. 236-237.

³ RDC/Box 32/Acc. No. 00681/*Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea*, General Assembly Official Records: Seventh Session, Supplement No. 15 (A/2188), New York, 1952, p.19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*. (Trenton N.J: The Red Sea Press, 1989), p. 79.

whether in *Kaffa* or *Wellega*; *Arusi* or *Sidamo* did not know anything but that Eritrea was united with Ethiopia."⁶ The Ethiopian people were informed that "they have won back Eritrea."

The major limitation of the UN federal resolution was that it did not specify for the establishment of a federal government distinctive from that of the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments. Holding the authority of the federal government, via its representative Ethiopia had a free hand in Eritrea. Its intervention in Eritrea's affairs became much more blatant with no outside power monitoring its actions. Hence, Ethiopia could not wait to dismantle the Federation through the Emperor's Representative in Eritrea, *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai, the Emperor's son-in-law. Few days after the ratification of the Federation, Andargachew told the American Consul, Edward Mulcahy, that the Eritrean flag-raising ceremony was "illegal." According to him, "legally no Eritrean flag exists."⁷ He viewed Eritrea as a mere province of the Ethiopian empire.⁸

Starting from the beginning of the Federation, the Ethiopian government took speedy measures that undermined the autonomy of Eritrea. The first incident was that in replacing the leaving British forces Ethiopian troops arrived to be stationed in Eritrea.⁹ In expressing his concerns about this move, the American Consul Edward Mulcahy in his cable to the State Department said:

From this vantage point it seems that the worst fears of the opposition-and even moderate elements- that the Ethiopians would try to make the federation appear as much like annexation as possible have been realized. The despatch of an entire brigade of Ethiopian troops into Eritrea - to replace a single British battalion of seven hundreds - is another unfortunate move. In short, there seems to be either (a) a complete lack of understanding on the part of the Shoans of the sentiments of Eritreans, or (b) a determination to ignore the fact that most Eritreans still actually want an honest federation and not an annexation.¹⁰

⁶ Zewde Retta, *Be Qadamawi Haile Selassie Zemene Mengist Ye Ertra Gudday 1941-1963* [The Affair of Eritrea in the Era of Emperor Haile Selassie I]. (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers, 2000,) p. 387.

⁷ American Consulate, Asmara, to the Department of State, Washington D.C., Dispatch No. 36. September 24, 1952. Quoted in Alemseged Abbay, *Identity Jilted or Re-Imagining Identity? The Divergent Paths of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalist Struggles*. (Lawrenceville, NJ, The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1998), p. 73.

⁸ In a speech on the occasion of the celebration of the 23rd coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie, he informed the audience that Eritrea was a province of Ethiopia. *Dehay Ertra* [Hereafter *Voice of Eritrea*] "Celebration of the 23rd Coronation in Asmara," (Translation), November 8, 1952.

⁹ Bereket Habtesellassie, "Eritrea and the United Nations," In *The Eritrean Case*, ed. Research and Information Center on Eritrea (Milan: Research and Information Center on Eritrea, 1980), p. 138.

¹⁰ United States Government, Department of State, Mulcahy to Secretary of State, June 1952. Quoted in Tekie Fessehatzion, "A Brief Encounter with Democracy: From Acquiescence to Resistance During Eritrea's Early Federation Years," *Eritrean Studies Review*, 2, 2, (1998), p. 36.

Another swift and bold attempt of Ethiopia in undermining the effectiveness of the Federation was observed when it established a Federal High Court through an Imperial decree known as Proclamation 130. According to this proclamation the Supreme Court of Ethiopia, through its Federal High Court in Eritrea had the authority to nullify any law or proclamation passed by the Eritrean Assembly, and any decision of the Eritrean Supreme Court, if the Ethiopian Court decided the actions of the Eritrean authorities and the Supreme Court of Eritrea were contrary to Ethiopian law or the 1931 Ethiopian Constitution.¹¹ The proclamation was aimed at weakening the newborn Eritrean government and undermining the independence of the judiciary system in Eritrea.

Hitting at the Eritrean economy was another assault of Ethiopia on the Federation. Immediately after the setting up of the Eritrean government, Ethiopia adopted a policy of devitalization of the Eritrean economy. As part of its economic policy, foreign investors and entrepreneurs were discouraged from engaging in business activity in Eritrea under the threat of expulsion. In addition, many factories such as textile, tanning, and earth-enware, were either shut down or relocated to Ethiopia.¹² Foreign investment was also discouraged in Eritrea. The *Voice of Eritrea* in its 30 July 1954 editorial wrote about the closing of industries in Eritrea, the fading activity of those remaining, and the existence of severe unemployment and even famine which, Eritrea never experienced during the European colonial period.¹³ Besides, Ethiopia adopted the view that Eritreans were subjects to Ethiopian authority rather than partners in the Federation. The Emperor's Representative pressed the appointment of *Shoans*¹⁴ to local federal offices rather than of Eritreans, and favored them in awarding federal contracts and concessions.¹⁵ Eritreans saw very little of postings in branches such as customs, post and telecommunication, railways, defense and justice, which became more Ethiopian than federal. Their consideration of fair representation waned since they were excluded.¹⁶ To reduce opposition to Ethiopia's position, the Eritrean trade union, political parties, and the press became targets. The General Union of

¹¹ *Voice of Eritrea*, Editorial, "Imperial Chamber and Delegate of the Assembly," (Translation), November 15, 1952.

¹² Okbazghi Yohannes, *Eritrea, A Pawn in World Politics*. (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1991), p. 189.

¹³ *Voice of Eritrea*, Editorial, "Economic and Political Problems in Eritrea," (Translation), July 30, 1954.

¹⁴ Shoa is one the largest state in central Ethiopia where the capital Addis Ababa is situated.

¹⁵ Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

¹⁶ Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia the Federal Experience*. (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1997), p. 82.

Eritrean Labor Syndicates was banned and its leader, Weldeab Weldemariam, was politically so harassed that he was compelled to flee the country.¹⁷

4.2 The Position of the Executive Branch of the Eritrean Government

While marching along the route that diminished the autonomy of Eritrea, the Emperor and his officials were not the sole actors. In all these courses the Unionist dominated Eritrean government of Tedla Bairu did not stand firm for the protection of Eritrean autonomy and did not demand the strict application of the Federal Act. The Chief Executive chose to function as "errand boy of the Emperor's Representative rather than as an executive of the Eritrean cabinet and of the Assembly that elected him."¹⁸ According to the British Consul in Eritrea, Tedla Bairu was not up to the heavy responsibilities placed on him.¹⁹ This view was shared by the then British Commissioner of Police of Eritrea, Colonel David Cracknell. The Commissioner criticized Tedla for his failure to protect Eritrea's right and allowing the Ethiopian government to intervene in Eritrean affairs at will.²⁰

Wilson Heathcote, the financial advisor of the Chief Executive, argued that the key problem lay with the Eritrean government in general and its Chief Executive in particular. His words read:

The dominating role of the Chief Executive in the Government cannot be overstressed. The Secretaries have been reduced to the status of clerks who are not permitted to take decisions on comparatively minor matters on their own. The Cabinet has never met despite the provision to that effect in the Constitution, neither has he taken any other steps to make the democratic provisions of the constitution function. On specious excuses he has violated the freedom of the press by suppressing the only independent newspaper, he has prevented reports of the Auditor-General being communicated to the Assembly and has vetoed persons returned in by-elections- all incidentally opposed to him politically. In the light of these facts I consider the thesis that he is a weak man unable to face up to his responsibilities vis à vis the federal government is untenable. The alternative argument that he is deliberately conducting the affairs of his country so that its complete amalgamation with Ethiopia will be an accomplished fact in a short time seems to me to be much more in keeping with the evidence. The deliberate avoidance of pressing for a settlement of the Eritrean share of customs, without which early insolvency is inevitable, the failure to take administrative decisions while keeping the right of decision in his hands all seem to me to point in the

¹⁷ Okbazghi, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹⁸ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 83

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Alemseged Tesfai, "A Bit of Eritrean History at Bridport, UK," *Eritrea Profile*, August 11, 2002.

same direction. Added to this it is more than possible that he is not politically his own master having given forfeits to the more extreme unionists. There was a widespread feeling that members of the Assembly were not allowed to carry out their proper functions and that they were being treated by the Chief Executive in a dictatorial and cavalier manner.²¹

The Executive branch of the Eritrean government, dominated by the Unionist Party, was reluctant to defend the Eritrean autonomy. Having considered the aspiration and role of the Unionist Party in Eritrean politics it is not surprising to observe such a stance. The attitude of Tedla Bairu towards the Federation was identical to that of the Ethiopian authorities. Some of his public statements disclose his sense of approving the Ethiopian position. On June 11, 1953 in a visit to the *Hamasien* region he said: "It was better to deny the rise of the sun than denying the union of Eritrea and Ethiopia." He added that groups opposing his view should understand that "without Ethiopia there is no federation and without the Emperor there is no salvation."²² On the assumption of Tedla, Eritrea could not survive alone without Ethiopia. In all of his visits he undertook to different regions of Eritrea, Tedla articulated the greatness of Ethiopia and the Emperor as well as the Ethiopian origin of Eritreans. He assumed the federal association of the two countries as a transitory bridge for a complete merger between them. Thus, his practical moves were directed in attaining such a goal.

4.3 Dealing with Andargachew and Tedla: The Eritrean Assembly in the Tenure of the First Chief Executive

Before addressing the role of the Eritrean Assembly in the early years of the Federation it is essential to make some notes on members of the Assembly. Except a few of its members who were acquainted with modern political systems and who played an active role in the Eritrean political arena during the British Administration, most of the Eritrean Assembly members were traditional chiefs who did not have exposure to the complex system of Assembly politics. Hence, the discussions and debates in the Assembly were mainly shaped by the influential personalities from both the Unionist and the federalist camps. The active elements in the Assembly, however, were highly engaged in defending their respective positions.

²¹ Memorandum of Mr. J. Wilson-Heathcote on Eritrean Politics and Finance. Quoted in Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²² *Etiopia*, Editorial, "The Chief Executive in the Hamasien Province," (Translation), June 14, 1953.

The Assembly's reaction to the actions of the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments was of a mixed nature. While the majority of Unionists vied for a closer union with Ethiopia, some federalists strived to protect the constitutional autonomy of Eritrea. Hence, the process of dismantling Eritrea's federal status did not go as smoothly as Ethiopia hoped it to be. Once the Ethiopian government began to encroach on Eritrea's internal affairs, opposition began to emerge in the Eritrean Assembly. Unpredictably, this opposition came not only from those members supporting the autonomy of Eritrea, but also from some Unionists. After the establishment of the Federation some moderate Unionists were inclined to become more federalist.²³ However, until the beginning of 1954 there was no marked opposition against the government of Ethiopia and Eritrea. As of 1954, however, the resistance began to take shape. A few Assembly members began to challenge not only the Ethiopian government but also the Eritrean Chief Executive. The Assembly became a place where opposition to the Ethiopian policy over Eritrea was centered. Although dominated by Unionists, the Assembly had an unorganized group of federalists who defended the spirit of the federation and the right it gave to Eritrea. This group of federalist members fought hard to maintain the integrity of the Federation.

The Assembly in the Early Years of the Federation

Early enquiries on the Eritrean Assembly were exposing the weak position of the Eritrean government in defending Eritrea's interest. E.g., following the issue of notice by the Emperor's Representative concerning the registration of foreigners in Eritrea, the Eritrean Assembly raised the first dispute on the division of powers between the Federal and Eritrean government. The issue was raised on December 25, 1952 by Kadi Ali Omar in the form of a written question.²⁴ On December 29, 1952, *Abba Habtemariam Nugurru*, a Unionist member of the Assembly, and *Kagnazmatch Berhanu Ahmeddin* asked the Assembly to resolve that "the Notice issued by the Representative of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor concerning the registration of foreigners is interference in the internal affairs of Eritrea." Arguing that the task of registering nationals and

²³ N.A., *Medrekhn Federeshn'n Gobeta Ertra B'Etyopian 1950-1962*. (Orota: NP, N.D.) p. 37; Alemseged Tesfai, *Federeshn Ertra Ms Ethiopia: Kab Matienso Ksab Tedla 1951-1955*. (Asmara: Hidri Publishers, 2005) p. 181. Notably, *Abba Habtemariam Nugurru* and *Fitawrari Mesfin Gebrehiwet* were some of the Unionists turned Federalists in the Assembly.

²⁴ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14005/ "Representative Assembly Questions by members". The Assembly had a culture in which members can demand answers from the Chief Executive to their written questions. The questions were transmitted to the Chief Executive through the clerk of the Assembly and the written replies were issued with the minute of the day's proceedings. The British Fergus McCleary served the Assembly as clerk during the first five years of the Assembly's tenure.

issuing identity cards and the payments of documentation fees were domestic affairs, *Abba Habtemariam* asked the government to take the necessary steps.²⁵ The Secretary of the Interior responded that the Eritrean government was unaware that the Ethiopian government had published the legal note. However, upon the publication of the note, said the secretary of interior, the Eritrean government made "immediate representations to the Imperial Federal government on the subject." The Secretary did not disclose the Ethiopian government's response to the representations.

Other questions to which the government had no satisfactory answers dealt with the appropriateness of the Ethiopian flag flying over the Eritrean government's main buildings, especially in towns outside Asmara. Some members questioned why Ethiopia imposed taxes on salt produced in Eritrea. Was Eritrea receiving its fair share of the customs revenues? The answers to each of the questions were similar in that "the issues were under discussion with the concerned Ethiopian authorities."²⁶ The Eritrean government was not willing and able to challenge the federal government on these issues. Surprisingly, opposition to Ethiopian interference was not confined to the Muslim League and EDF members of the Assembly. Some Unionists also emerged to challenge the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments.

Outside the Assembly, the main campaigner for the respect of Eritrean federal rights was the EDF's organ, *Dehay Ertra (Voice of Eritrea)*. The newspaper criticized the Eritrean government's failure to defend Eritrea's interest. The paper covered a range of issues pertaining the federation and the Assembly. The Chief Executive was not happy with the paper for publicizing the dispute between the government and the Assembly and on the Assembly for picking up on the issues the paper had raised. The fact that the *Voice of Eritrea* had become influential with the Assembly and the public created some sort of worry to the government of Tedla Bairu. The *Voice of Eritrea*, in its editorial of November 29, 1952, strongly criticized the Chief Executive who offered high paying jobs in his administration to thirteen members of the Assembly. The newspaper was against the move because the new appointees were elected by the people to represent them in the Assembly. Their primary responsibility was to represent the people, and not to accept jobs in government. If representatives could be tempted with promises of jobs,

²⁵ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14001/EA/ADM/ Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 129, December 29, 1952.

²⁶ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14001/EA/ADM/ Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 133, January 5, 1953; See also Tekie, "A Brief Encounter...", *op. cit.*, p. 45.

wrote the paper, then the check-and-balance so central to the integrity of the constitutional form of government was gravely threatened. The *Voice* echoed "the Chief Executive by offering other positions to the members of the Assembly and the members by accepting the granted positions violate the very constitution they approve," and it asked "then who is going to defend the constitution"?²⁷

Falling out with the Chief Executive, the newspaper was forced to shut down. However, the paper won its case in a court and the Supreme Court ruling instructed the government to allow the paper to publish. The Chief Executive, however, closed down the paper by his own decision.²⁸

In its infancy, the federation was not functioning. Muslim leaders who saw the breaches of Eritrean autonomy sent a letter on January 30, 1953 to the Emperor calling for the proper implementation of the UN resolution, but to no response. The letter was then forwarded to the members of the UN tribunal in Eritrea on February 28. They called for the handing over of all the internal communications, i.e. railways, transport, telecommunications and customs, to the government of Eritrea; and to handing over all the internal affairs such as salt, accommodations, the foreigners' identity cards tax, health and education tax, the anchorage tax in both Massawa and Assab; participation of Eritrea in the defense affairs, the financial and currency regulations and in all the external affairs of the federal government. They urged equal participation of Eritreans in all the aforesaid affairs of the federal government, handing over the internal affairs to the Eritrean government, and equal appointment of judges for the Federal High Court. They requested the UN to send an international committee to Eritrea with a view to ascertain whether the UN resolution and the Eritrean constitution were being applied in letter and spirit or not.²⁹ The letter was the first sign of a vote of no confidence on the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments with regard to their respective position in respecting the Federation.

²⁷ *Voice of Eritrea*, "Creaky in the Constitution of Eritrea" (Translation), November 29, 1952. In late 1952 and throughout 1953 several members of the Assembly resigned from their posts in favor of nomination as administrators and other key positions in the Eritrean government.

²⁸ Tekie, "A Brief Encounter...", *op. cit.*, p. 48.

²⁹ The petition was signed by thirty-three Muslims in the case of that sent to the Emperor and by 120 Muslims in that sent to the UN. RDC/Box 10/A/FED/1/Acc. No. 14081, "Letter to HIM the Emperor of Ethiopia, Sovereign of Federation" January 30, 1953; RDC/Box 10/A/FED/1/Acc. No. 14081, "Application for Applying the United Nations Resolution and the Constitution of Eritrea, as such Application is being neglected by the Ethiopian Government" February 28, 1953.

The Eritrean discontent on the implementation of the Federation and the understanding of the status of Eritrea in real autonomy were in a clear contradiction to the understanding of the Emperor's Representative in Eritrea, *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai. In addressing the opening of the Eritrean Assembly on April 27, 1953, Andargachew lectured on his meaning of the Federation and how members should use it "as guide-posts in their deliberation in the Assembly". Andargachew lectured members of the Assembly that they should recognize that Eritrea, from ancient times, was an integral part of Ethiopia and that its legitimate name was "Hagere Hamasien". According to him, as of September 11, 1952, Eritrea was restored to its 'Mother Country'. Continuing his address the *Bitweded* said:

As from September 11th, Eritrea has been federated with its mother country and has since then become a part of the whole of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, as the term "Federation" is not familiar in our country, there are people who think that Eritrea is still outside of Ethiopia. The words and acts of these people show their desire to represent Eritrea as a separate country or Government. This misrepresentation has been the result of the lack of understanding of the term "Federation". I feel that there are factions who do not wish you to understand the proper meaning of the term "Federation". Therefore, the meaning of the term "Federation" which I am going to expound to you here is the meaning which you ought to know and accept. Since September 11th, 1952, Eritrea has become a part of the Empire of Ethiopia. Eritrea has been reunited with its mother country. Eritrea, which has become a part of Ethiopia, has been given internal autonomy through its constitution drafted under the auspices of the United Nations and ratified by His Imperial Majesty. This arrangement has been given the name of Federation. Hence the true fact is that there are no separate names for Ethiopia and Eritrea, but that a part of Ethiopia called Eritrea. To refer to Ethiopia and Eritrea as separate is erroneous and should be eradicated from any one's mind.³⁰

In responding to the critics of the *Voice of Eritrea*, Andargachew said any rumor that there is a massive denial of rights or that the Federation is about to collapse is nothing but baseless propaganda. He promised Assembly members that nothing will happen to the Federation, since the Emperor had pledged to safeguard it. He said: "I assure you that the Imperial Ethiopian government will resist with all its power anyone who may, by force, oppose the Federation". At the same time he told them it was up to the desire of the people to decide a change in their status. In contradiction to the UN Commissioner's stand, Andargachew said: "the Federation shall remain effective as long as the entire population of Eritrea is not inclined otherwise. ...The right to maintain or disrupt the Federation and choose its destiny rests with the Eritrean people

³⁰ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14002/EA/ADM/ Eritrean Assembly Minutes No. 144, Monday 27th April 1953, Appendix "A" "Speech from the Throne Delivered by the Representative of H.I.M. to the Eritrean Assembly," April 27, 1953.

themselves. It is the sole concern of the Eritrean people either to support or reject the Federation".³¹

The Speech of the Emperor's representative sparked some resentment. Some members of the Assembly were stunned by the content of the address. Their reaction was, according to American Consul Clark, "one of anger and resentment".³² The President of the Assembly, Ali Mohammed Musa Radai, was so upset with the address that he offered to resign his post in the Assembly.³³ It also provoked a strong protest from Kadi Ali Omar and Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan. Kadi Ali in a letter to the President of the Assembly requested that the Emperor should give an explanation to his representative's referring of "there is no Eritrea but Eritrea part of Ethiopia".³⁴ Members opposing union objected the speech on the ground that the praise enclosed in the speech were of such a nature that it threatened the autonomy of Eritrea.

With the *Voice of Eritrea* banned there was no discussion on Andargachew's address to the Assembly. The address had a chilling effect on the members. Clark, the American Consul wrote:

As the only opposition paper, the *Voice of Eritrea*, has been closed by the government, there is no organ through which the opposition could make its views known. Most qualified observers with whom I talked, however, are of the opinion that the speech reflected Ethiopian concern with the political and economic situation in Eritrea and determination to keep opposition and criticism down by the full weight of its authority and power if necessary. They view the address as constituting one more step toward what they consider is Ethiopia's ultimate goal of complete domination of the 'autonomous unit' of Eritrea.³⁵

³¹ *Speech from the Throne Delivered by the Representative of H.I.M. to the Eritrean Assembly*, April 27, 1953.

³² United States Government, State Department, Clark to Secretary of State, May 11, 1953. Quoted in Tekie, "A Brief Encounter...", *op. cit.*, p. 49.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/11/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14028/ "Motion on the Rights of Eritrea", Letter from Kadi Ali to the President of the Assembly, July 26, 1953. Prior to this on June 24, 1953 Ibrahim Sultan also requested a debate on the speech of Andargachew as a discussion item on the Assembly's agenda for the day. The proposal was rejected on technical grounds. The Proposal had to be forwarded forty-eight hours in advance. RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/11/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14028/ "Letter of Ibrahim Sultan to the Clerk of the Assembly", June 24, 1953. Muslim League-affiliated Ibrahim Sultan and Kadi Ali were the main among the outspoken members of the Assembly that opposed the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean Executive. At one point the British clerk of the Assembly, McCleary, advised the president of the Assembly that it was unwise to block them from raising issues. In his letter sent to the President of the Assembly, McCleary mentioned that Ibrahim Sultan, Kadi Ali and some other members of the Assembly were most anxious to debate on the speech of the HIM representative. The Clerk suggested that he could not stop them from waging the debate in the Assembly and the HIM representative should be present in the Assembly to reply to their questions. RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/12/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14029/Eritrean Assembly/ "Letter of the Clerk of the Assembly to the President of the Eritrean Assembly", July 3, 1953.

³⁵ United States Government, State Department, Clark to Secretary of State, October 12, 1953 Quoted in Tekie, "A Brief Encounter...", *op. cit.*, p. 51.

By the first anniversary of the Federation, the trend towards annexation was clear. Simultaneously, a remarkable shift in the public attitude towards the federation and the democracy it provided began to emerge. The more Ethiopia moved to undermine Eritrea's autonomy the more Eritreans saw themselves as guardians of the autonomy. The growing opposition to Ethiopia's hegemony in Eritrea bounced from the lines of the Unionists. According to the Police Commissioner, Cracknell, by 1953 "the more fanatic of the young Unionists, formerly of a 'union or die' attitude, have now changed their cry to 'Federation or die.' ...modern Christians and Muslims, many of them leaders and important members of the government, were stiffening their attitude towards the Federal (Ethiopian) government."³⁶

After one year of the federal experience, most Eritreans had given up on the government of Eritrea as a protector of Eritrea's autonomy. They began to look towards the UN and the Western powers who crafted the federal arrangement. In a show of a vote of no confidence in the Eritrean government, on October 10, 1953, leaders of the three Muslim parties, Ibrahim Sultan (Muslim League), Mohammed Omar Kadi (Independent Muslim League Party), and Ahmed Abdelkadir Bescir (Nationalist Party) informed the Chief Executive, the President of the Eritrean Assembly and the members that due to the Ethiopian government's violation of the UN resolution and the administration of the federal affairs alone, they sent a telegram to the UN intervention and monitor the situation. They petitioned that the Ethiopian government had appropriated the positions and functions of the Federation without giving Eritrean's their due share in the administration. Copies of the telegram were distributed among the consular offices of the United States, United Kingdom, Italy and France.³⁷ By the end of 1953 Eritrean autonomy was severely compromised. The Federation existed in name only. But the Ethiopian view was well shared by the Chief Executive and the committed Unionist Party, who accepted federation as a transitional phase towards total union.

The Assembly Challenging the Chief Executive and the Emperor's Representative

In the early years of the Federation, opposition to the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments was confined to few federalist members of the Assembly. In the beginning of 1954, however, coupled

³⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁷ RDC/Box12/A/M/15/ Acc. No. 14157 "Letter of the Muslim League, Netsa Rabita Islamiya and Hizbe Al Wetan to the Eritrean Chief Executive, the Eritrean Assembly President and its members", October 10, 1953.

with the return of the *Voice of Eritrea* to publication on March 5 of that year, tangible opposition began to emerge. The return of the paper and its continuous coverage of events in the Assembly gave the public a forum to track the debates in the Assembly. The paper also became a channel through which people used to remind the Assembly of its constitutional responsibility of maintaining check and balance and forcing the government to become more accountable. Gradually, a handful of federalists in the Assembly began to raise the issue of the Ethiopian governments' actions for discussion. Due to various reasons, their motion would usually fail or would never make into the day's agenda. The call of Assembly members for a special session to discuss Ethiopian action also turned down by the Chief Executive.³⁸

While the Muslims in the Assembly and outside were engaged in a campaign for the maintenance of Eritrean autonomy, the Chief Executive, Tedla Bairu, was more concerned with his power and the privileges that emanated from it. He paid no attention to the Assembly and his cabinet. One of his criticisms was when he let labor strikes in Massawa and Assab to be settled by the federal authorities brutally. Hence, in the beginning of 1954, Tedla Bairu was alienated even from his own cabinet. His loyalty to and respect for Eritrean autonomy was very much questioned. According to Tekeste, in the race to abolish the federation, Tedla was much faster than the Ethiopian authorities.³⁹

Seeing the steady erosion of the Federal Act, the pressure from the public and the *Voice of Eritrea* on the Assembly was mounting. At the same time the Chief Executive's relation with the office of the Emperor's Representative was further complicated by Tedla's inability to manage the Assembly. Simultaneously, resentment to Ethiopia's interference and the Chief Executive's negligence of the matter rose in the Assembly.

In May 1954, the Chief Executive presented his annual report to the Assembly. The report, however, failed to mention Ethiopian interference in Eritrean internal affairs. On May 22, 1954 some members of the Assembly were so dissatisfied with the inadequate report of the Chief Executive that they passed two motions calling on Ethiopia to cease interfering in the internal

³⁸ Tekie, "A Brief Encounter...", *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁹ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98. On February 25, 1954 Ibrahim Sultan questioned why the Ethiopian government was allowed to station its troops in urban centers such as Massawa and what was the position of the Eritrean government over the issue. He also criticized the Eritrean government for failing to speak about the incidents in Massawa and Assab where protesters were killed. RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/6/Vol. II/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14019 "Letter from the Clerk of the Eritrean Assembly to the Chief Executive", February 25, 1954.

affairs of Eritrea. *Sheikh* Mohamed Musa Abudaud and *Sheikh* Idris Mohamed Adem called a motion that the Federal authorities were attempting to corrupt the faith of the Eritrean Assembly members and the Eritrean government officials. The motion requested the Chief Executive to ask the Emperor, as head of the Federation, to safeguard Eritrean autonomy and stop further violations of the Eritrean constitution and the UN resolution. Furthermore, the motion asked the Chief Executive to request for UN immediate intervention if he would fail to obtain from the Emperor an assurance to comply with the UN resolution within twenty days. Assembly members also called for the formation of a special committee to investigate how and why the Emperor's representative was interfering in Eritrea's internal affairs.⁴⁰ Until this time resistance to Ethiopia's behavior was confined to Ibrahim Sultan and his few colleagues, who made several unsuccessful attempts to have the Eritrean government explain to the Assembly the basis for the Emperor Representative's interference in the internal affairs of Eritrea. Each time the attempt was made, it failed in the Unionist dominated Assembly. In this case, however, even the Unionist vice president of the Assembly, *Blatta* Demsas Weldemikael, along with some other Unionists voted in favor of the motion.⁴¹

The Assembly's resolution was reported by the *Voice of Eritrea* a historic act of courage. The paper wrote in its headline: "Congratulations the People of Eritrea! Your representatives demonstrated courage."⁴² The Chief Executive protested to the President of the Assembly that the Assembly passed 'unwise' resolution which he termed "a very serious allegations against His Imperial Majesty's government". As the Emperor was on his state visit to the United States, the

⁴⁰ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14003/EA/ADM/ Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 304, May 22, 1954. The Assembly's resolution had three parts: (A) to form a committee to explore why and how the Ethiopian (Federal) government had been subverting Eritrea's autonomy and democratic institutions, (B) to make an official representation to the Emperor, in his capacity as the Head of the Federation, about the violations in the federal arrangement, and so ask him to correct the situation as soon as possible, and (C) if no satisfactory answers were obtained in twenty days, notify the UN General Assembly about the Ethiopian violation of the UN decision on Eritrea. The UN would be notified about the following violations: (1) violation of the rights and dignity of the people and the country; (2) the attack of Federal troops on the civilian population in Assab, where several were killed; (3) the levying of unfair taxes on salt, an Eritrean product; (4) the illegal intervention of the Federal High Court in the internal affairs of Eritrea's constitution; (5) the refusal of the Ethiopian government to recognize the right of the Eritrean government to register foreigners residing in Eritrea; and (6) the illegal expropriation of the internal communication system by the federal government. All the allegations were widely discussed in the Assembly and the *Voice of Eritrea* the previous years.

⁴¹ Alemseged Tesfai, *Federeshn Ertra Ms Ethiopia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 521.

⁴² *Voice of Eritrea* "Congratulations the People of Eritrea! Your Representatives Demonstrated Courage," (Translation), May 28, 1954. The motion was passed with 41 "Yes" 9 "No" and 1 "Abstention".

Chief Executive informed the President of the Assembly that no action whatsoever was possible to be taken and demanded the Assembly should revert its decision.⁴³

Some members of the Assembly also urged the Head of the UN Tribunal in Eritrea, Arthur Reid, to submit a copy of the motion to the UN Headquarter in New York, which he did when he finally departed to the United States, closing his office in July 1954. Reid submitted the motion with a new petition by some Assembly members which called for the UN to institute a center in Eritrea which could monitor the Federation. The UN response, through its Executive Assistant of the UN Secretary General, Andrew Cordier, to the motion and the petition was "File - No Action".⁴⁴

In August 1954, the Assembly forced Tedla to send two telegrams to the Emperor. The first was signed by twenty-nine members, calling for Ethiopia to refrain from subverting Eritrea's autonomy, and the second telegram was sent by another thirty-four members and which had a contrary spirit to the first telegram.⁴⁵ Following this, the Chief Executive began to suspend Assembly sessions as a means of avoiding criticism. Seeing the steady rise of opposition in the Assembly, the Emperor's Representative had found sufficient reasons to be dissatisfied with the performance of Tedla. In such circumstances some members of the Unionist Party, led by a prominent member of the Orthodox Church, *Melake Selam* Dimetros Ghebremariam, began their campaign to oust Tedla from power.⁴⁶

Discussion and criticism of the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments continued for some time in the press before the Federal authorities decision to bring the editors of the *Voice of Eritrea* to court. The paper's coverage and its critiques on the political system in Ethiopia also gave it extensive popularity beyond Eritrea's borders and wide readership in the Tigray province of Ethiopia. Though it was difficult to openly demand democracy in Ethiopia, there was underground pressure to ask similar rights to those of Eritrea. And this was an apparent threat to

⁴³ RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/12/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14029/Eritrean Assembly/ "Letter of the Chief Executive to the President of the Eritrean Assembly," June 30, 1954.

⁴⁴ Alemseged Tesfai, *Federeshn Ertra Ms Ethiopia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 535-538. The petition was signed by Omar Akito, Kadi Ali Omar, Said Sefar, Omar Suleiman, Idris Mohamed Adem, Saleh Ahmed Ashekih, B'emnet Tessema and other Assembly members.

⁴⁵ RDC/Box 9/A/F/8/Vol I/Acc. No. 14071 "The Emperor's Answer to the Telegrams" August 26, 1954.

⁴⁶ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 100. Some Assembly members were also questioning why the Chief Executive ignore to answers their questions forwarded to him. RDC/Box 6/I/A/4/ Vol III/FED/ASS/ Acc. No. 14020 "Question Omar Suliman to the Chief Executive," March 25, 1954. *Melake Selam* is a clerical title meaning 'messenger of peace.'

the Emperor's governance in Ethiopia. The selling price of the Tigrinya version of the *Voice of Eritrea* in Tigray (1 Birr), which was ten times its price in Eritrea (10 cents), was attesting to the reputation of the paper.⁴⁷

It did not take long for the paper to become the renewed target of the federal authorities. On July 28, 1954, six members of the *Voice of Eritrea* were charged by the Federal Court for "subversive political activity endangering the integrity of the Federation and promoting the disintegration".⁴⁸ They were accused of working for the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia. The Tigrinya and Arabic editors, Elias Teclu and Mohamed Saleh Mahmud, appealed to the President of the Eritrean Assembly for the seizure of the case by the Eritrean High Court. They urged their protection should be guaranteed by the constitution of Eritrea and demanded to be tried at the Eritrean government's court of justice. They called the President of the Assembly to defend the principles of Eritrea's internal autonomy.⁴⁹

The case of the *Voice* stiffened the opposition of Muslim members in the Assembly. On August 17, 1954 twenty-five Muslim members of the Assembly in protest to the Ethiopian authorities' interference in Eritrean affairs abstained to attend sessions of the Assembly and demanded the President of the Assembly, Ali Mohamed Musa Radai, to publish the text of their demand in newspapers.⁵⁰ They were demanding the prosecution of the editors of *Voice of Eritrea* by the Eritrea's High Court and rejected any association of their case with the Federal Court. The Eritrean constitution stipulated that the Eritrean Supreme Court was the court of last resort in Eritrea, and that the Federal Court had no jurisdiction over the internal cases. Members brought the proposal forward in the Assembly while there was a discussion over the Eritrean budget. Some members demanded the Assembly should first and only discuss on the case of the *Voice*, threatening in case of a failure to discuss the issue that they would boycott attending the

⁴⁷ Memoirs of Mikael Hasama Rakka, *Zanta Ertra* [The Story of Eritrea], February 1986, p. 152. Mikael Hasama Rakka had a long experience in the British and Ethiopian Administrations. In 1948 he was appointed Administrator of Halhal in Sahil. During the Federation and Haile Selassie eras he was an Administrator of the districts of Semhar (Massawa), Keren, Dankalia (Assab) and finally Akele-Guzai.

⁴⁸ RDC/Box 9/A/F/8/Vol I/Acc. No. 14071 "Criminal Case No. 251/46".

⁴⁹ RDC/Box 10/Acc. No. 14079/A/1/Eritrean Assembly, "Letter of Ilias Teclu and Mohamed Saleh Mahmud to the Eritrean Assembly President," 4th *Nehase* 1946. The corresponding date in Gregorian calendar for this was August 12, 1954.

⁵⁰ RDC/Box 9/A/F/8/Vol I/Acc. No. 14071 "Letter of Muslim Assembly members to the President of the Assembly," August 17, 1954.

Assembly. Several times the Assembly could not approve the budget for the lack of quorum.⁵¹ To their dismay, the Federal Court pronounced the editors guilty. Its Tigrinya and Arabic editors, Elias Teclu and Mohamed Saleh Mahmud were sentenced to five and ten years' prison terms respectively and the paper ordered to cease publication.⁵² The press freedom which British Eritrea had enjoyed was come to an end.

In an attempt avoid the challenge to his power from the Assembly, Tedla Bairu began to suspend regular Assembly sessions. In August 1954, he suspended the Assembly for twenty days when he realized that many members of the Assembly had expressed their intention to discuss the proceedings pending in the Federal Court against the *Voice of Eritrea*. This was a big blow for him in the Assembly. He would have improved his position and perhaps amended his damaged reputation had he allowed the Assembly to discuss the legality of the Federal Court to try the case which was already dealt with by Eritrean Supreme Court earlier, or if he would have settled the matter in a negotiation with the Federal authorities, or if he had tried to persuade members in defense of the federal authorities on the issue. His act of suspending the Assembly increased the resentment from the Muslim League and failed to satisfy either the Unionist party or the office of the Emperor's Representative.⁵³

On September 9, 1954, the Emperor's representative requested Assembly members to appear at the imperial palace to hear a reply from the Emperor to their questions.⁵⁴ The Emperor's reply was that "the minority in the Assembly should not try to impose their will over the majority." The reply further reads: "so far as we know, nothing has been done by the federal government to deprive you from your right so far."⁵⁵ Following the Emperor's reply, on September 11, 1954 Tedla Bairu made it clear in an open declaration that he would favor complete union with Ethiopia. On the occasion of the celebration of the New Year and the second anniversary of the Federation he said: "...there are many people who ask what is the view of our Chief Executive *Dejazmatch* Tedla Bairu concerning the current and future status of our country. While

⁵¹ RDC/Box 9/A/F/8/Vol I/Acc. No. 14071 "Letter of Assembly members to the Chief Executive and President of the Assembly," August 19, 1954.

⁵² Tekie, "A Brief Encounter...", *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁵³ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 100. According to Article 48.5 of the Eritrean constitution the Chief Executive had the authority to suspend the Assembly for a period not exceeding twenty days at a time if he felt that law and order was threatened.

⁵⁴ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14003/EA/ADM/ Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 330, September 9, 1954.

⁵⁵ RDC/Box 9/A/F/8/Vol I/Acc. No. 14071 "The Emperor's Answer to the Telegrams" August 26, 1954.

maintaining the huge responsibility and the promise that is entrusted upon me in good faith, I am honestly severing our Emperor and country. My joy would be great on the day that the people of *Mereb Mlash* (Eritrea), after studying the situation, choose a complete union over the federal union."⁵⁶ Tedla's open announcement of his position hardened the opposition to him among the federalist members of the Assembly. His political statement which was in a clear agreement with the official Ethiopian position was perceived as a great threat by the federalists. Added to his dictatorial behavior this resulted in a rapid deterioration of his control in the Assembly.

The Chief Executive's speech sparked an immediate and long discussion among the Emperor and his Ministers in Addis Ababa on the key issue of whether to terminate or keep the Federation. On September 12, the Emperor called a special meeting of his ministers and chiefs to discuss the Chief Executive's speech. The Emperor was very keen on the idea of ending the federal arrangement and saw no problem in executing the plan. His Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aklilu Habteweld and his Minister of Pen, Weldegiorgis Weldeyohannes, however, opposed the move, reminding the Emperor that the action would result in a serious criticism against Ethiopia from the UN and some of the Western countries. The ministers rather advised the Emperor that all the necessary procedures should be arranged before moving into action. Aklilu insisted that keeping the Federation alive was to the interest of Ethiopia as it might attract the Somalis to join Ethiopia in a similar arrangement with the end of the British and Italian trusteeships in six years' time in 1960. The Minister of Pen in his turn recommended Eritreans longing for union should be notified that this was not the proper time to execute the plan; thus, they had to wait patiently. It was at the end of this discussion that the Emperor agreed on keeping the Federation.⁵⁷

Outside the Assembly discussions, political activities of groups opposing union with Ethiopia came under close scrutiny. Political activities, except of the Unionist party which was allowed officially to retain its office and activities, were curtailed. In March 1954, Muslim members of the Assembly accused the Eritrean government of restricting the activities of Muslim League in Asmara, Keren, Massawa and Addi Keyih.⁵⁸ In September 1954, the leaders of the Muslim organizations convened in Keren, which about 2,500 people were said to have attended. It was an

⁵⁶ *Zemen*, "Celebration and Speeches in Asmara on the Occasion of the second anniversary of the Federation," September 14, 1954.

⁵⁷ Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, pp. 440-454.

⁵⁸ RDC/Box 6/I/A/4/ Vol III/FED/ASS/ Acc. No. 14020 "Question of Omar Suliman to the Chief Executive", March 25, 1954.

attempt of solidifying the strength of the Muslim League to match the threat from the Eritrean and Ethiopian government policies over the future of Eritrea. The meeting concluded in a decision that the League should not fall into the trap of the federal government. Furthermore, the League agreed to give six months to the Eritrean government to readjust its attitudes towards the Muslim population after which the Emperor or, if necessary, the United Nations would be officially approached.⁵⁹

The year 1955 began with a sharpening of the relation between the Emperor's Representative and the federalist members of the Assembly. During the Assembly's first regular session of the year, Andargachew highly criticized Assembly members for the lack of harmonious and cooperative work and weakness of their unity which resulted in sending a telegram to the Emperor protesting his office's interference in the internal affairs of Eritrea and that he attempted to corrupt the faith of members of the Assembly. Addressing the Assembly on March 28, 1955, in defense of his office, the Emperor's Representative said:

Neither I nor my assistants would understand, nor did anyone explain to us the meaning of the allegation that the Office of H.I.M.'s Representative has intervened in the internal affairs of Eritrea and has attempted to corrupt the faith of the Members of the Assembly. In any case there is no internal or external affair as far as the Office of H.I.M.'s Representative is concerned and there will be none in the future. The affairs of Eritrea concerns Ethiopia as a whole and the Emperor. Anything done to the advantage or disadvantage of Eritrea will never fail to affect Ethiopia. We know that Eritrea has internal autonomy but unless a good administration as well as genuine unity is ensured, it will be of no benefit to Ethiopia as a whole and to Eritrea in particular. We will therefore spare no effort to see that all the inhabitants of Eritrea live in peace and harmony.⁶⁰

It is worthwhile to explain the power and authority of the Emperor's Representative in Eritrea. The Emperor's Representative was the highest authority in Eritrea and there was no limit to his power. He had a power which enabled him to established direct contacts with government authorities, chiefs and ordinary citizens. Enlisting collaborators to his government's ideals was one of his priorities. Every principal appointment to a position in the Eritrean government was under the direct control of his office and approval. Preserving one's position or assuring new appointments were guaranteed only if one was willing to live in an agreement with the Emperor's Representative. At some point even the Chief Executive, Tedla Bairu, was warned by the

⁵⁹ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁰ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14004 "Speech from the Throne Delivered on the 28th March 1955, by H.E. *Bitwedded* Andargachew Massai on the Opening of the First Regular Session of the Eritrean Assembly," March 28, 1955.

Emperor's Representative, Andargachew, not to appoint anybody whose appointment was not approved by the office of the Emperor's Representative.⁶¹ The words of Mikael Hasama Rakka, who was a district governor in the period, are very revealing. In his memoir the former governor noted:

Every employee of the Eritrean government who received a new appointment or who was promoted should have to go to the Emperor's Representative and prostrate himself before him. Refusal to prostrate oneself was considered an opposition to the government of Emperor Haile Selassie, thus, he would be summoned and admonished. I was one of them. When in 1954 I was appointed governor of the Red Sea Division, I left for Massawa without performing the prostration. The Emperor's Representative had resentment against me. When the French government gave a small ship as a present to Ethiopia, the Emperor's Representative came to receive it to Massawa and we met; he asked me 'are you the district governor?' When I answered in the affirmative, he replied that when I came to Asmara next time, I should come to his office, as he had something to tell me, and he left. ...When I went to Asmara, he received me in audience and asked me what I thought the office to which I had been appointed belonged to. He added that any office appointment came from Emperor Haile Selassie, and that since there was nothing that happened without his will, any person receiving a new office appointment had to come to the office of the Emperor's representative and prostrate himself. Since I was not aware of this practice, I apologized for my previous mistake and affirmed that I was going to fulfill future commands, and I left.⁶²

Weakening any devotion to Eritrean autonomy, this policy was pursued throughout the federation years as a cornerstone of the Emperor's strategy in Eritrea. And it gained some sort of success.

The Emperor's Representative tried also to recruit some Assembly members through bribery. According Clarence Smith, a judge in the Eritrean Supreme Court, eleven Muslim members of the Assembly from the Keren area were bribed by the Emperor's Representative with 1000 Ethiopian dollars each to demand complete merger with Ethiopia in the Assembly. Furthermore, in another instance of the Emperor's Representative's attempt, Smith mentioned in the aftermath of the Assembly's May 22, 1954 famous motion that demanded the end of Ethiopia's interference, some twenty-six thousand Ethiopian dollars were prepared targeting twenty-six members to revert their vote for the said motion.⁶³ The office of the Emperor's Representative

⁶¹ Memoirs of Mikael Hasama Rakka, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-153.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Clarence Smith to Warstrom, see Alemseged Tesfai, *Federeshn Ertra Ms Ethiopia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

secured the service of some members through providing regular monthly payments. This payment was referred in the period as 'salary of the humble'. This was additional payment to their official monthly salaries from the Eritrean government.⁶⁴ This could be considered as one way of conscripting collaborators.

Bitweded Andargachew Messai:
The Emperor's Representative in Eritrea (1952-1959)



Source: Zewde Retta, The Affair of Eritrea.

The year 1955 saw a key development when in May some members of the Assembly pressed to end the federation in favor of unconditional union with Ethiopia. To the annoyance of the Chief Executive, the vice representative of the Emperor, Asfaha Weldemikael, played an active part in instigating the demand from the members.⁶⁵ The attempt, which the Assembly never discussed,

⁶⁴ My Interview with *Sheikh Saleh Musa Abudawud*, Asmara, December 12, 2012. According to the informant, the office of the Emperor's Representative provided some Assembly members 250 Ethiopian dollars per month. When this is compared to the official monthly salary of a member, which was 176 Ethiopian dollar, it was more than enough to secure the service of members. Assembly members representing the Unionists were the most beneficiaries of such incentives. Similar information in RDC/Acc. No. 05086, Ref. Su/93/90, Interview with *Kegnazmatch Sunebara Mahmud Damana* by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Sudan, February 19, 1990.

⁶⁵ Bocresion Haile, *The Collusion on Eritrea*. (unpublished book, 2000), p. 121.

did not materialize. Spencer claimed credit for keeping the federation alive. In his memoir he noted: "I immediately opposed the project, pointing out that were Ethiopia to accept the proposal, she would seriously aggravate the already delicate situation at the United Nations where Italy was opposing Ethiopia in the boundary dispute over the Ogaden."⁶⁶ Indeed, in this early period the Emperor did not want to risk any condemnation by terminating the federation.

The rough relation of the Assembly with the Chief Executive reached its peak in June 1955. The tendency of the Chief Executive's excessive use of his power continued. Some Unionists who were hindered from having direct contact with the office of the Emperor's Representative by the Chief Executive were not happy with the actions of the Chief Executive. But by this time they were in contact the Emperor's representatives without the Knowledge of the Chief Executive. And such behavior seriously annoyed the Chief Executive.⁶⁷ The Chief Executive, thus, was under a combined attack of the federalist and Unionists. The frustrated members directed their attacks at Ali Mohamed Musa Radai, the president of the Assembly, who had a close relationship with the Chief Executive. In early June some members were agitating to collect a vote necessary to get a two-thirds majority to a vote of no confidence on both the Assembly's President and the Chief Executive. Tracking the developments on June 16, Tedla again suspended the Assembly for twenty days until July 5 and his decision was announced to the Assembly via the vice-president.⁶⁸

The incident created an opportunity for members plot against the Chief Executive and remove him from power. Initially, using their right in the Eritrean constitution, members asked for his prosecution at the Supreme Court.⁶⁹ The charge against him was not supported by the judge in the Supreme Court for the lack of evidence. Nonetheless, when on July 6, 1955 the Assembly met again back from its twenty days of suspension, the first thing it did was passing a vote of no confidence on both the Chief Executive and the President of the Assembly, Sheikh Ali Mohamed

⁶⁶ Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

⁶⁷ RDC/Acc. No. 04999, Ref. L0035, Interview with *Grazmatch* Ahmed Saleh Barole by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Adi Keyih, (Eritrea), April 29, 1991.

⁶⁸ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14004/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 385, July 6, 1955. The Chief Executive suspended the Assembly in what he termed the "present unsatisfactory situation and disagreement of grave nature which has arisen among the honorable members of the Assembly".

⁶⁹ RDC/ETH/BIO/44.11, Tedla Bairu/ "Eritrean Assembly members to the President of the Supreme Court," June 21, 1955. Forty-four Assembly members signed the call for the prosecution of the Chief Executive.

Musa Radai.⁷⁰ Surprisingly, forty-four members brought the matter before the Emperor's Representative and later to the Emperor.⁷¹ The Emperor summoned his representative in Eritrea, the Chief Executive, and the President of the Assembly and ten other members of the Assembly in Addis Ababa to resolve the issue. Attesting his strained relation with the Emperor's Representative, the Chief Executive informed the Emperor "that if Andargachew Messai remained in office as His Imperial Majesty's representative in Eritrea, he would have no alternative but to resign".⁷² The Emperor who noticed the alienation of the Chief Executive by the great majority of the members of the Assembly settled the matter in favor of the resignation of Tedla Bairu and the President of the Assembly, and instructed them both to finalize the necessary formalities with the Assembly.

On July 28, 1955 Idris Mohamed Adem, replacing Ali Mohamed Musa Radai, was elected President of the Assembly.⁷³ Tedla Bairu warned that the removal of Ali Radai would create resentment in the Western Province. It seems for this reason that the new president was appointed from the same region. On August 3, 1955 Tedla Bairu's resignation letter, dated 28th July 1955, was read to the Assembly. It read: "I have hereby determined to submit to the Assembly my resignation from the office of the Chief Executive for reasons of health."⁷⁴ Although it was clear that Tedla's dispute with his own Assembly and his dictatorial behavior cost him his post, the pressure from the Emperor's representative on him was also so high. In an interview he held with a certain Italian named Franco Pierini in Stockholm Tedla said:

The representative of the Emperor was collecting all the taxes, the customs revenues, the incomes of Eritrea. Nothing was left to us anymore to live as an independent country with its own administration. The debt of Ethiopia towards Eritrea was growing frightfully. Also the Ethiopian police apparatus was oppressing the Eritrean police. The situation was already unsustainable in 1955

⁷⁰ RDC/ETH/BIO/44.12 Tedla Bairu/ Members opposition to the Chief Executive was directed against his dictatorial treatment of the Assembly. Besides, his relation with the Assembly was further strained for his character of nepotism and general inefficiency of his government.

⁷¹ *Etiopia*, July 10, 1955.

⁷² Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 105. See also *Etiopia*, "The word of the People turn a word of God "(Translation), July 31, 1955.

⁷³ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14004/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 389, July 28, 1955. Ali Radai was deeply thanked by the Emperor and his representative in Eritrea for the service he bestowed during his tenure as president of the Assembly. He was then appointed an advisor in the office of His Imperial Majesty for eight months and then Secretary of social affairs of the Eritrean Government to the end of the Federation. *Ethiopia*, "The word of the People turn a word of God," (Translation), July 31, 1955. See also Lloyd Ellingson, *Eritrea: Separatism and Irredentism, 1941-1985*. (Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1986) pp. 202-203.

⁷⁴ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14004/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 390, August 3, 1955.

when I presented my resignation. The pressure for the abolition of the Federation and the pure and simple union of Eritrea with Ethiopia were becoming stronger every day. We were a disoriented and confused leading class; few of us would still recognize to have committed an error so serious. Clearly, Haile Selassie and his *rasses* wanted to govern us like one of the many tribes of the empire, while we were proud to have created a small African state with a parliament which was functioning with an administration which respected the right of the citizens. What a sadness.⁷⁵

Tedla's serious confrontation with the Assembly, and the dissatisfaction of the Emperor and his representative on his performance, and the fallout among his own circles of the Unionist Party, were all contributing factors to his fall. Thus, Tedla Bairu's influence, the key person in the Unionist Party who played a big role in facilitating the Emperor's policy in Eritrea, came to an end. As Tedla's required service was already accomplished, the Emperor did not dare to defend his right hand man in the Eritrean political arena. The reception Tedla received following his resignation was telling. Zewde Retta noted:

The next day after his resignation, the usual palace Cadillac did not await Tedla when he arrived from Asmara to Addis Ababa. Neither he was received by the usual security Captain who used to accompany him to his Cadillac. He took one of the taxis in the airport and headed to the Ras Hotel. When the next morning he arrived at the Emperor's palace via his friend's car, the Emperor talked to him three minutes and instructed him 'until We let you know your job, stay here'.⁷⁶

The chapter of Tedla's service was closed for the Emperor. The next chore was to look for another key person in the Eritrean circle who could fulfill his part in the Emperor's politics.

⁷⁵ RDC/ETH/REL/128/07, Tedla Bairu interview, by Franco Pierini, Stockholm. The date of the interview is not mentioned. However, as the interview was made after Tedla Bairu's defection in 1967 to the Eritrean Liberation Front, it was sometime in the late 1960s. When Pierini asked Tedla if there was an error of judgment on his stand and what forced him to become a nationalist from being ardent supporter of Ethiopia, Tedla Bairu attesting the glory of the Emperor in the period and how Eritreans understood the Emperor said: "I made a mistake in judging a man [The Emperor], not the historical situation." After leaving his post as the Chief Executive of Eritrea, the Emperor posted Tedla Bairu to Sweden as Ethiopian ambassador for a period of years before he was recalled to Addis Ababa and later retired into the Ethiopian senate from which he defected.

⁷⁶ Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, p. 475.

***Dejazmatch* Tedla Bairu:
The First Chief Executive of the Eritrean Government (1952-1955)**



Source: Zewde Retta, The Affair of Eritrea.

4.4 The Change in the Eritrean Leadership

The developments that led to the resignation of Tedla Bairu from the post of Chief Executive strengthened the position of the Ethiopian government at the expense of Eritrean autonomy. On August 8, 1955 the Assembly voted, with 48 'for', 17 'against', and 2 'spoiled votes', to appoint the vice representative of the Emperor in Eritrea, *Fitawrari* Asfaha Weldemicael, to be the new Chief Executive of Eritrea. The next day he took an oath of office.⁷⁷ Even though he was appointed Chief Executive of the Eritrean government, Asfaha Weldemikael retained his post as the vice Representative of the Emperor in Eritrea.⁷⁸ His appointment was a big blow to Eritrean autonomy and the existence of the Federation.

⁷⁷ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14004/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 391 & 392, August 8 and 9, 1955. During the 1940s Asfaha Weldemichael was one of the Emperor's trustful Eritreans in Addis Ababa and member of the Society for the Unification of Eritrea with Ethiopia. After the setting up of the Federation he was appointed the vice representative of the Emperor in Eritrea and was second in power next to Andargachew Messai. His stance on the Eritrean-Ethiopian relation was very well known.

⁷⁸ Memoirs of Mikael Hasama Rakka, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

The circumstances that led to the election of the new Chief Executive are interesting. The radical Unionists under *Melake Selam Dimetros* were pushing for the appointment of the Emperor's vice Representative, Asfaha Weldemikael, while the moderate Unionists supported *Fitawrari Haregot Abbai*, Tedla's Economic Secretary. Asfaha himself proposed to the Emperor the appointment of the President of the Unionist Party, *Dejazmatch Beyyene Berakhi*. Andargachew saw the appointment of the Emperor's Vice Representative as breaching the law, and recommended Beyyene Berakhi. The Emperor, however, insisted every effort should be made to bring his vice Representative to power. His words are revealing:

...the appointment of Asfaha to the post of the Chief Executive is not only our good will but our strict demand. You mentioned that this might not be supported by the law. We have considered that and talked Aklilu about it who informed Us the Chief Executive should not necessarily be from the Assembly. The fact that Asfaha is Our Vice Representative will help him more to take the responsibility. Asfaha's appointment was decided on Our part. Thus, you have to work towards its realization. Beyene Berakhi's service is so high. Hence, as Asfaha had recommended to Us before, We will soon appoint him *Ras*. As We know the service of Haregot Abbai too, We will consider what he deserves in the future. Anyway, all of you should work and Asfaha should be appointed.⁷⁹

Having double authority and securing the backing of the Emperor and his representative, the new Chief Executive was at ease in staffing his cabinet and every key position in the Eritrean government with staunch Unionists. The key position of the Department of Interior was handed to *Dejazmatch Araya Wassie*, famous for his extremist views within the Unionist Party.⁸⁰ In about forty-five days after the coming to power of the Chief Executive, on September 24, 1955, the Assembly passed its vote of no confidence on the vice president and elected the devoted Unionist *Melake Selam Dimetros Ghebremariam*, a clergyman in the Coptic Church.⁸¹ The vice president, *Blatta Demsas*, refused to resign his post on his free will on demand. He had to be ousted by a vote.⁸² In September, another key position, the Commissioner of Police, which was under Colonel Wright, was filled by Tedla Uqbit, another devoted supporter of the Unionist Party.⁸³ The Chief Executive was now in a much stronger position to pursue his objective of the liquidating the Federation.

⁷⁹ Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

⁸⁰ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁸¹ RDC/Box 1/Acc. No. 14004/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 410, September 24, 1955.

⁸² Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, p. 493; see also Bocresion, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

⁸³ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 112

Under Asfaha's leadership, the speedy erosion of the Federal Act continued. In October 1955, some members had proposed a significant amendment to be made in the Eritrean Constitution. The President of the Assembly, Idris Mohamed Adem, and some other members did not agree on the proposal. The president perceived the proposal perilous and consulted the clerk of the Assembly, Fergus McCleary, who communicated the matter to the Legal Advisor, F.F. Russell. The proposal targeted the key apparatus of the Eritrean autonomy. It demanded: the Chief Executive to be appointed by the Emperor instead of being elected by the Assembly; Amharic to be the official language of Eritrea replacing Tigrinya and Arabic; and the removal of the flag, seal and arms of Eritrea.⁸⁴ The Legal Advisor responded that the issue of language, flag, arms and seal could be amended only with a two-third majority vote in the Assembly. However, he declared that the proposed modification concerning the appointment of the Chief Executive by the Emperor could not be amended at all since it was contrary to article 16 of the constitution and undemocratic.⁸⁵

The position of the Legal Advisor gave some encouragement to the Muslim League to resist the motion. The Muslim League submitted a petition to the Emperor's Representative and the Chief Executive strongly protesting against the move, and if the motion was put forward, it said it would appeal to the UN. The motion to amend the constitution did not materialize. But concrete practical measures were underway by the Secretary of Interior, *Dejazmatch* Araya Wassie. He took one of the first measures to undermine the Federation by putting into effect one of the proposed changes: while Emperor Haile Selassie's silver jubilee of coronation was in celebration on November 2, 1955, Araya Wassie removed "the Eritrean flag which had been put up in the streets together with the Ethiopian flag".⁸⁶ Seyid Abdellah Abdurahman, member of the Assembly, asked why the flag was removed from the scene.⁸⁷ The Muslim League also reacted swiftly. In a letter sent to the Acting Chief Executive, Araya Wassie himself, the League expressed its irritation by the action and threatened that it would stage a public demonstration the

⁸⁴ RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/6/Vol. II/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14019/ "Letter from the Clerk of the Eritrean Assembly to the Legal Advisor, Eritrean Government," October 6, 1955.

⁸⁵ RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/6/Vol. II/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14019/ Letter of F.F. Russell to F.H. McCleary "Contemplated Amendments to Eritrean Constitution," October 13, 1955. Article 16 of the Eritrean constitution stipulated "the Constitution of Eritrea is based on the principle of democratic government." And article 67 stated that the Chief Executive must be elected, in a secret ballot, by the Assembly.

⁸⁶ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 113; RDC/Acc. No. 03319/Memoir of Omar Kadi, *Tarikh Hagerka Miflat*. [Knowing History of your Country], p. 49.

⁸⁷ RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/6/Vol. II/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14019.

following day if the matter were not corrected. The Government restored the flag on the same day of the petition.⁸⁸ The matter was of course postponed for the future.

Parallel to practical moves executed by the Eritrean leadership and the Ethiopian authorities that aimed to weaken the Eritrean autonomy, the belief to protect the rights of Eritrea did not die among some Assembly members. Some members were pressing for the respect of Eritrea's status in the Federation. On November 30, 1955 Assembly member *Sheikh* Mohamed Saleh Musa Abudawud, questioned the silence of the Eritrean government in defending Eritrea's rights. He demanded the imposition of a tax on Ethiopian cars entering Eritrea, as the case was that when cars from Eritrea were obliged to pay Ethiopian dollar 80 to the federal authorities as a circulation tax when they entered either Adigrat or Adwa.⁸⁹

The unequivocal position of the Ethiopian government on the status of Eritrea, however, was again made clear to the Assembly when the Emperor's representative made his last address to the first Eritrean Assembly. The tone and content of Andargachew Messai's address of April 19, 1956 was emphasizing to the members of the Assembly that Eritrea was an integral part of the Ethiopian state since ancient times. Andargachew informed Assembly members that "Eritrea was lost to its Motherland and its people were separated from their Ethiopian brothers for seventy year," but, continued Andargachew, "seventy years of tyrannical foreign rule could not destroy the history of three thousand years nor could they eradicate from Eritrea the spirit of Ethiopianism. It is the unconquerable spirit of our forefathers which developed in the three thousand years of one history that sustained the independence of Ethiopia and led to the liberation of Eritrea".⁹⁰

The race to undermine the Constitution and autonomous status of Eritrea continued among the Unionists. During April 1956 Unionist members of the Assembly were still working on the amendment of the Constitution that Tigrinya be replaced by Amharic and the Chief Executive be directly appointed by the Emperor. Opposing the move, the Muslim League reacted by sending a telegram to the Representative of the Emperor; the Chief Executive; the President and members

⁸⁸ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁸⁹ RDC/Box 6/A/ADM/6/Vol. II/FED/ASS/Acc. No. 14019. Adigrat and Adwa are towns situated in Ethiopia's northern province of Tigray.

⁹⁰ RDC/Box 18/Acc. No. 14278/Eritrean Assembly Minute No. 451, Appendix "A", "Speech from the Throne," April 19, 1956.

of the Assembly; the Supreme Court and the Legal Advisor. The League warned any amendment "will be considered as a change to the problem of Eritrea which has been already solved". The Party also sent a telegram to the European consulates informing them of the situation at the same time reminding them of their responsibility on the consequences in the event that constitutional amendment limited the rights of the people and the autonomy of the country.⁹¹

In defense of the Constitution and Eritrean autonomy, the Muslim League and its representatives in the Assembly were battling against the combined threat from the Unionist Party and the Ethiopian government and the faction of the Muslim League of the Western Province that was prepared to vote together with the Unionists. In such circumstances Muslim members of the Assembly began to search support from followers outside of the Assembly. On the April 19, 1956, Kadi Omar Ali in the Asmara Grand Mosque, *Al-khulefae' Al-rashidin*, pronounced his frustration and loss of faith in the majority members of the Assembly. He said: "we were chosen to serve our people with honesty and loyalty. Contrary to this, most of us have been corrupted; our flag is going to be eradicated, the same is happening to our official languages. People! invoke the alarm and do whatever is possible. I have raised my responsibility. Our religion is in danger as well. About forty Assembly members have betrayed and signed."⁹² According to him some Muslim members of the Assembly also defected to the Unionist's cause.⁹³

Ibrahim Sultan also revealed his fear of domination in Keren among his group, the Tigre. He called up on them to fight for their flag; otherwise he warned them, it might bring a blow to them and their religion. He called: "...the Tigre people be resilient. If our flag is gone, we have neither a religion [Islam] nor a property. We shall return to our previous status."⁹⁴ Convinced that the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments were working solidly together to eradicate the Federation, Ibrahim Sultan's efforts were also directed towards the European Consulates in Eritrea. His

⁹¹ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

⁹² RDC/Box 126/INT/S/B/Vol. I/Acc. No. 15174/Police Secret Activities 1956/ "Movimento Delle Persone Politicanti," April 21, 1956.

⁹³ Ibid. The Asmara Grand Mosque became a venue for Muslim Assembly members to discuss national issues. The report of the Senior Divisional Officer of Asmara and Hamasien show that during May and June of 1956, eighteen Muslim members of the Assembly were discussing in the Mosque the Assembly's attempt to abolish the Eritrean flag and Arabic language. RDC/Box 124/INT/I/1/Acc. No. 15164/Office of the Senior Divisional Officer Asmara and Hamasien to Director of Interior, Government of Eritrea, "Annual Report - Asmara and Hamasien Division", October 11, 1956.

⁹⁴ RDC/Box 126/INT/S/B/Vol. I/Acc. No. 15174/Police Secret Activities 1956/ "Letter from Omar Jabir to Ato Embaye," May 22, 1956.

personal contacts with the British and French Consuls attests the level of his fear of the imminent threat from the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments to the Federation.⁹⁵ By mid-1956 his party, the Muslim League Keren branch, was banned from staging meetings and political activities by the Eritrean police.⁹⁶

Witnessing the events of the period and the Emperor's policy towards Eritrea, the Intelligence Office of the US State Department in its report of early 1956 stated: "The Ethiopian government has been quite openly moving to reduce Eritrean autonomy to a minimum. If the process continues, Eritrea will become no more than a province of the Ethiopian empire within a few years."⁹⁷ The report also acknowledged that the opposition in the Eritrean Assembly was highly dependent on the intervention of the UN. It said: "unless the world organization support the Assembly's resistance and calls for the discontinuity of Ethiopian actions the resistance will never gain success."⁹⁸ The repeated calls to the UN, however, all went in vain.

During May and June of 1956, the Muslim League engaged the Eritrean government on the legality of the electoral procedure to the Second Eritrean Assembly, which was to be held in September of the same year. According Article 45 of the Eritrean Constitution the Eritrean government was bound to establish an Electoral High Commission which would supervise elections. The matter was raised in the Assembly by members of the Muslim League, but the Assembly refused to entertain the issue. However, encouraged by the stance of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Eritrea, Sir James Shearer, who was approached on the issue and to support the establishment of the Electoral High Commission, the President of the Assembly, *Sheikh* Idris Mohamed Adem pressed on the necessity of the establishment of the Commission. Dissatisfied with the position of the president of the Assembly, the swift reaction from the Chief Executive and Federal government to this was to oust him from his post. A vote of no confidence

⁹⁵ RDC/Box 126/INT/S/B/Vol. I/Acc. No. 15174/Police Secret Activities 1956/ "Movimento Delle Persone Politicanti," August 14, 1956. The secret police report mentioned Ibrahim Sultan's personal contacts with these European Consuls was to submit his letter of protest against the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments.

⁹⁶ RDC/Box 15/Fed/A/MISC/Vol IV/Acc. No. 14249/ "Letter of the Keren branch of the Muslim League to the Chief Executive," June 26, 1956.

⁹⁷ RDC/Acc. No. 06037, *The Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation: A progress Report*, Intelligence Report No.7130, Department of State, Office of International Research, Washington, 8 February 1956 (With an Information Deadline 31 December 1955) p. iii.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

was engineered in the Assembly which removed him from the post and replaced by *Sheikh* Hamid Ferej Hamid, from the Muslim League of Western Province.⁹⁹

Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan: Secretary General of the Muslim League and EDF



Source: Zewde Retta, The Affair of Eritrea.

Having only a year in power the new Chief Executive, Asfaha Weldemikael, deepened the division within the Assembly and strengthened his position. The small band of federalists in the Assembly, however, did not match the prolonged attack from the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments on Eritrean autonomy. The tenure of the first Eritrean Assembly came to an end with an imminent danger for the autonomy of Eritrea and the life of the federation. The next chapter will be looking the tenure of the Second legislature of the Assembly.

⁹⁹ Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, p. 497; see also Tekeste, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115. Idris Mohammed Adem had distributed to Muslim leaders throughout Eritrea a thousand copies of a letter by Sir James Shearer, president of the Supreme Court. Sir James strongly believed that article 45 of the Eritrean constitution, appointing an Electoral High Commission, should be implemented prior to the impending elections. This view was contained in a letter to the Chief Executive, with a courtesy copy to the president of the Assembly, Idris himself. Some members, pressured by the public which had remained sympathetic to Idris' political sentiments, attempt to stop the proceedings by boycotting the Assembly when it opened on May 31, 1956; for without a quorum no vote could be taken. This strategy lasted for two weeks during which fifty members of the Assembly were summoned one by one to the palace in Asmara until 13 June, a quorum had been reached that ended Idris' role as president of the Assembly. See Ellingson, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-180.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian government, that did not consider Eritrea as a partner in the Federation, accepted the association of the two countries as a return of a "lost province" into the "Motherland". This uncompromising posture was the main obstacle for the proper implementation of the Federation. Hence, in the immediate aftermath of the Federation, the Ethiopian government started to undermine the autonomy of Eritrea and its democratic institutions. Ethiopia's assault on Eritrean autonomy, however, was not challenged by the Eritrean government, whose executive branch was in favor of the Ethiopian position.

The attack on the autonomy of Eritrea, however, generated a notable opposition during the tenure of the first legislature of the Eritrean Assembly. The struggle to maintain Eritrean autonomy was centered among a group of federalists in the Eritrean Assembly and the weekly paper of *Voice of Eritrea*. Although constantly harassed by the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments this small band of federalist members of the Assembly and the *Voice of Eritrea* fought hard to maintain the integrity of the Federation. The early years of the Federation, however, acquainted Eritreans with democracy and democratic institutions. The short-lived free press, the Assembly and the Eritrean constitution were some manifestations of it.

In the Assembly, Eritrean autonomy was compromised due to the polarized socio-political position of the groups that it consisted. The Assembly did not succeed in fully safeguarding the autonomy of Eritrea mainly because the executive branch of the Eritrean government, headed by Tedla Bairu and later by Asfaha Weldemikael, and the dominant faction in the Assembly, was a force that had campaigned for a complete merger of Eritrea with Ethiopia. When the Chief Executive, who was one of the top rank leadership of the Unionist party, put maximum effort towards the goal of union with Ethiopia, the Assembly for most of the period did not press him for accountability. Many of the Assembly members did not challenge the Chief Executive to halt his unilateral adventure.

Furthermore, the UN, as the author of the arrangement, failed to monitor the progress and proper implementation of the federation. Its reluctance to review the complaints addressed to it by members of the Assembly and some of the political groups show its tacit approbation of the Ethiopian position.

Chapter Five

The Second Eritrean Assembly and Rapid Deterioration of the Federation (1956-1960)

Introduction

Chapter four assessed how the First Eritrean Assembly, composed of Unionists and anti-unionists alike, was operating in the early years of the Federation and described the endeavors of the Assembly's federalist group in safeguarding Eritrean autonomy. It also touched upon the rough relation of the Assembly with the First Chief Executive of Eritrea and the Crown's Representative. This chapter principally deals with the succeeding Eritrean Assembly, which took office in September 1956. In this section, I will discuss the elections and constitution of the Second Eritrean Assembly. Through highlighting the decisive legislations that the Assembly enacted in its four year term and that severely compromised Eritrean autonomy, I will screen the main issues that contributed to the feebleness of the Second Eritrean Assembly. At the end, I will touch upon how Eritrean resistance to Ethiopian hegemony developed outside of the Assembly.

5.1 The 1956 Elections and the Making of the Second Eritrean Assembly

Legality of the Electoral Law

The tenure of the first Eritrean Assembly was concluded in June 1956 while the debate on the electoral law applicable to the upcoming elections in August was in progress. Many members of the Muslim League raised the issue of Proclamation 121, as an electoral law, to be resolved and petitioned to the Supreme Court of Eritrea. Sir James Shearer, President of the Supreme Court was also firm in preserving the power of the Supreme Court and of the Eritrean Constitution. Shearer insisted that the Eritrean government was bound by article 45 of the Constitution to establish an Electoral High Commission to supervise elections. The Eritrean and Federal authorities on the other hand opted for the application of the existing Proclamation 121 for the upcoming election.¹

¹ Notably *Blatta* Omar Kadi and *Sheikh* Ibrahim Sultan filed petitions to the Eritrean Supreme Court indicating the unconstitutionality of Proclamation 121 to be used for the 1956 election. See Lloyd Ellingson, *Eritrea: Separatism and Irredentism, 1941-1985*. (Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1986) p. 181.

The aforesaid proclamation was a temporary electoral law devised by the British Administration in 1952 to supervise the election of the first Constitutional Assembly. Proclamation 121 was administered by the Chief Executive and provided him significant flexibility to manipulate election outcomes. According to the proclamation, all the returning officers to supervise the elections, who were charged in determining the eligibility of candidates and counting the votes, were directly appointed by the Chief Executive. These characteristics of Proclamation 121 were very much to the liking of the Eritrean and Federal authorities, as they gave the Chief Executive nearly absolute control over the composition of the Assembly. According to the Eritrean Constitution, however, elections should be supervised by an independent Electoral High Commission. Article 45 of the Constitution stipulated "An Electoral High Commission consisting of three persons appointed by the Supreme Court established under Article 85 shall be responsible for supervising all electoral proceedings (including the compiling of electoral rolls), and for preventing or putting a stop to irregularities. The High Commission shall appoint, in each constituency, from among the electors of that constituency, a representative to act under its authority."²

The Federal and Eritrean authorities knew that conducting the 1956 election with an independent commission meant losing the majority of assembly seats. According to the American Consul Richey this fear compelled the Chief Executive to insist on Proclamation 121. Richey reported:

Given the present political climate in Eritrea as I see it, I am of the opinion that they would be roundly defeated in the Assembly elections conducted in a free manner as envisaged by the constitution. This accounts for their apparent determination to hold the elections under Proclamation 121 which will permit manipulation by the Chief Executive who is firmly in the grip of the Palace and who never makes a move or an important decision except as directed by the *Bitweded* (Emperor's Representative).³

The Chief Executive, Asfaha Weldemikael, however, reintroduced Proclamation 121, which empowered him to control assembly elections. The Eritrean Assembly, in its entire ten years' tenure, had never considered or passed legislation on Proclamation 121. The Assembly also failed to consider and adopt the Eritrean Electoral Act.⁴ If it would have been passed, the

² Constitution of Eritrea, 1952.

³ Clark to State Department, 777.00/5-1456, May 14, 1956, quoted in Tekie Fessehazion, *Eritrea: From Federation to Annexation 1952-1962*. (Unpublished Working paper, Eritreans For Peace and Democracy), 1990, p. 36.

⁴ In 1953, the Assembly failed to approve the Electoral Law prepared by Bennet, the Legal Consultant to the British Administration, and presented to it. This was probably for the lack of support from the unionist delegates. Again in

Electoral law would have permitted direct elections throughout the territory, which would have curtailed the Eritrean and Federal authorities' control of the Assembly. Through the indirect elections of the Electoral College, whereby in most cases local chiefs and elders appointed those who were to be in the Electoral College, it was easy to manipulate who would be elected.

The Election and its Irregularities

While the constitutionality of the electoral law was questioned by many, elections for the second Eritrean Assembly were held on September 5 and 6, 1956. Similar to the 1952 elections, direct elections were held only in Asmara and Massawa. The primary elections for the indirect elections outside of Asmara and Massawa were held during August and the secondary elections in September 5 and 6 as per the date of the direct elections in Asmara and Massawa. The allocation of seats remained the same as the elections for the first Assembly except a change in the name of the administrative divisions of the Red Sea and Western Province Divisions. This time the Red Sea Division was divided into Massawa and Assab Divisions, while the Western Province was divided to the Keren and Aqordat Divisions. Hence, the final allocation of seats in the territory was, Akele Guzai 12, Seraye 12, Hamasien 7, Keren 15 Aqordat 8, Massawa 3, Assab 2; Asmara city 7, Massawa city 2.⁵

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the First Eritrean Assembly, although with substantial Unionist components, had strived for the proper implementation of the Federal Act and the respect for Eritrean autonomy. It had challenged both the Eritrean government to defend the interests of Eritrea within the federation and the Ethiopian government to cease its interference in the internal affairs of Eritrea and refrain from its acts of weakening Eritrea's autonomous status. Apparently, the Emperor would not tolerate such behavior in the Second Eritrean Assembly. The principal way of securing this was to dominate the Assembly with loyal people. In doing so the Chief Executive, Asfaha Weldemikael, and the vice president of the Eritrean Assembly, Dimetros Ghebremariam, and the Commissioner of the Eritrean Police, Colonel Tedla Uqbit, became key instruments for the Emperor.

March 1956 the Assembly declined to consider the electoral law when some members asked for a debate on the forthcoming election and discuss the legality of Proclamation 121 as an electoral law. See FO371/118744. Confidential. British Consulate-General, Asmara to J.E. Killick Esq., British Embassy, Addis Ababa. Asmara, 19.6 1956, in Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia the Federal Experience*. (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1997), p. 217.

⁵ *Zemen*, July 25, 1956.

Elections for the second Eritrean Assembly were held with huge involvement of the Eritrean and Federal Governments. The Clerk of the Assembly Fergus McCleary and Judge Clarence Smith, who followed the election, pointed out that the Eritrean police and Federal authorities "frightened off any possible opposition."⁶ Asfaha Weldemikael's main responsibility was to insure that seats to the Second Assembly would go only to government-sponsored candidates. Since Asfaha and the federal authorities favored the election of those who opted for complete union with Ethiopia, they did their best to hamper the election of those alleged opponents. *Grazmatch* Uqbe Haile Ghebrekidan, former Unionist member of the Assembly, told me "If the government did not like you, there was no chance of you being elected. I came into the Assembly because the government supported my election."⁷ The British observation of events in the period supported such claims. One report reads:

Strong Unionists have been placed in positions where they can influence to the utmost the forthcoming election (in August); apart from the Secretaries of the Executive itself, the Vice-President of the Assembly, the Chief of the Police and many of the district officials are now prominent members of the Unionist Party. While it is of course most improbable that the election would be fought on outwardly Unionist versus Federalist lines, candidates amenable to Government influence may well be returned in a large proportion of constituencies, and the new Assembly will no doubt contain a substantial majority of members who would supinely vote for any motion which was presented to them. At the same time, precipitate action is likely to be avoided, in view of the Ethiopian desire to make a good impression on world opinion in 1960, when the future of the former Italian Somaliland will raise itself in an acute form.⁸

The Eritrean Police, headed by the ardent Unionist Colonel Tedla Uqbit, played a significant role in harassing the anti-Unionist candidates and voters. The police's action ranged from detaining candidates prior to registration (nomination) and election dates to obstructing voters, in case of the electoral colleges in the districts, from reaching the voting venue on polling days. In the case of indirect elections, controlling the electoral college was vital in deciding who would be elected. The government task was to convince and prepare the electorate for who should they vote for.⁹

⁶ FO371/118744.BCA to BEAA, 28.8.56. Quoted in Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 116. Their report also said: "the situation in the districts is that only one candidate, and he a pro-Unionist is permitted. Others are ordered to keep to their houses or are hauled before the court and fined, their conviction automatically disqualifying them from nomination as a candidate".

⁷ My interview with *Grazmatch* Uqbe Haile Ghebrekidan, Asmara, December 13, 2012.

⁸ FO371/118738. Eritrea Annual Review for 1955. The review can be found in an appendix in Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

⁹ RDC/Acc. No. 05086, Ref. Su/93/90, Interview with *Kegnazmatch* Sunebara Mahmud Damana by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Sudan, February 19, 1990.

In cases where the electorates were considered uncooperative, imprisoning them ahead of the election day was another method used to influence the election outcome. There were complaints on this issue in Liban (Seraye division). Three of the electoral colleges for the Liban district were imprisoned on August 31, before the scheduled election for their constituency was to be held on September 5, 1956. They were neither given an explanation for their imprisonment nor a chance to substitute them with a new electoral college.¹⁰ In another case, inhabitants of the Sahel area sent a telegram to the Chief Executive protesting that members of their electoral college and candidates were detained by the police.¹¹ Similarly, the police force in Mendefera and Addiquala engaged in preventing electoral colleges from approaching the voting venues.¹²

There were also cases in which the police would arrest candidates whose election was deemed undesirable. They could be arrested with any excuse and released after the nomination or election period was over. In some cases the Supreme Court was notified by candidates or their supporters to monitor the action of the police. There were some cases in which the Supreme Court, under Sir James Shearer, compelled the police to justify their actions of detaining candidates. In the event of the police's failure to show a concrete reason for detaining a candidate, the Court ordered the immediate release of the detainee.

In a few cases, the Supreme Court's intervention in protecting candidates was successful. The police were subject to legal scrutiny of their actions in the Supreme Court, which was staffed by neutral judges. The case of *Bashai Fesseha Weldemariam*, a staunch federalist, was exemplary. Objecting to the threats from the police commissioner, Fesseha was arrested on the eve of the nomination day of candidates in his Tse'azega district. He was then released two days after the registration period was over. His attempt to register as candidate in Asmara, which had a different nomination deadline, was obstructed again by another arrest. He was then sentenced to a three months' prison term for an alleged charge of having held two hand-grenades and a pistol.¹³ His case, however, was brought to the Supreme Court by his friends, and the Court

¹⁰ RDC/Box 15/FED/A/Misc/Vol. IV/Acc. No. 14249/"Complaints and Claims from the People of Liban District" September 10, 1956.

¹¹ RDC/Box 86/INT/A/4/ Acc. No. 14932/Parliamentary Elections/"Telegram from the Representatives of the Sahel Tribe to the Chief Executive," August 20, 1956.

¹² RDC/Box 86/INT/A/4/ Acc. No. 14932/Parliamentary Elections/"Telegram from Bezabh Tesfabruk [Returning Officer] to the Chief Executive," August 13, 1956.

¹³ According to Article 10 of Proclamation 104, issued in 1951 to minimize the rampant *Shifita* (banditry) problem, the police were empowered to arrest a suspect and keep him in custody for three months without the due process of

ordered his release on bail unless the police had evidence for his arrest. To the dismay of the government and the police, Fesseha managed to register on the last nomination date in Asmara and was elected to the Assembly.¹⁴

Officials of the Eritrean government were also directly involved in deciding who should be elected. Voters from the Akele Guzai division protested in a letter to the Clerk of the Assembly and the Supreme Court that *Azmatch* Zerom Kifle, the director of Interior of the Eritrean government instructed, electoral colleges of the area that they must vote for *Dejazmatch* Gebrezghi Guangul, otherwise they might be severely punished. Having the backing of the government the candidate, *Dejazmatch* Gebrezghi, claimed he was chosen by the Chief Executive, hence informed voters there was no need for them to appear in the polling station in Addi Keyih for voting. The same instruction was given to the electoral colleges by the district officer of the area.¹⁵

The Eritrean government headed by Asfaha Weldemikael was tireless to make sure Assembly seats were dominated by the Unionists. The harassment directed towards candidates especially in the rural areas was rampant. The 1956 elections, where 188 candidates contested for 68 seats, finally resulted in a resounding victory for Unionists. Thirty-two members were newly elected, while the rest were re-elected members.¹⁶ The election was also a big victory as it slashed out the entire federalist caucus that challenged the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean leadership in the first Assembly. Those who had been uncooperative with the palace were not reelected. Personalities such as Ibrahim Sultan, *Kadi* Ali Omar, *Abba* Habtemariam Nugurru, Idris Mohammed Adem, *Kadi* Musa, Abudawud and the likes did not return to the second Assembly.

Sheikh Saleh Musa Abudawud, the federalist member of the first Eritrean Assembly, remembers how the government eliminated him from the second Assembly. According to him, the Chief Executive's first attempt to get rid of him was to approach Abudawud's father, a respected village

law for three months. The three months prison terms, if necessary, could also be extended with another three additional months.

¹⁴ RDC/Acc. No. 05084, Ref. SU/91/90, Interview with *Bashai* Fesseha Weldemariam by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Sudan, February 3, 1990.

¹⁵ RDC/Box 11/EA/HM/19/Acc. No. 14097/Hon. Member *Dejazmatch* Gebrezgi Guangul "recusation of the Election of *Dejamatch* Ghebrezghi Guangul, Letter from representatives to the Clerk of the Assembly and The Eritrean Supreme Court," September 10, 1956. The Electoral Colleges were from Che'alo Hadadem, Deghien, Egela Hazzin, Seleste Addi Gulti, Shew'ate deqi Zer'i Senai and Mezhe villages.

¹⁶ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

elder, and convince him that his young son should not run for re-election. Considering the traditional power of the father and the respect he had in his society, the Chief Executive's calculated his strategy would simply work. He thus sent a personal messenger to Abudawud's father to inform him that his son was much detested (*Aziyu Tetseli'u*) for his role in the previous Assembly and promised that if he refrained from being a candidate Abudawud would be provided with a position he would prefer to have in the government. The offer was accepted by the father which Abudawud opposed and run for election. Unsurprisingly, his contest to the Assembly became not a success.¹⁷

The Chief Executive and *Bitweded* Andargachew were also reluctant to accept anti-Unionist candidates in some way managed to succeed in the election. The case of *Sheikh* Mohammed Omar Akito, a passionate anti-Unionist member of the Assembly representing Assab, was one strange case. Due to his record in the first Assembly Akito was not welcomed to come out in the second. Initially, he was discouraged by the Eritrean government and the police from running as candidate. As an act of warning a bomb was thrown into his living room.¹⁸ When he persisted, in spite of concerted harassment, and even won the election in his district, the Eritrean government refused to recognize his victory. The Eritrean Assembly, doing the bidding of the government, also declared his election invalid. The Chief Executive reported that certain "irregularities" had occurred and that the Assembly must deal with the matter. In a letter addressed to the Clerk of the Assembly, Asfaha Weldemikael thus outlawed the election of Mohamed Omar Akito under the pretext that he was elected on errors in the voting process and the counting of votes.¹⁹ He requested the Assembly to annul the election of Omar Akito. The issue was put to a vote and his election was considered invalid with a vote of 42 to 7 with two abstentions.²⁰ The Assembly's action was taken without the Assembly having done any independent investigation. Akito, however, appealed to the Supreme Court, alleging that the Assembly's decision was not based on any satisfactory enquiry. The Supreme Court reviewed the case, with a panel of five judges,

¹⁷ My Interview with *Sheikh* Saleh Musa Abudawud, Asmara, December 12, 2012.

¹⁸ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁹ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14009/ Letter from the Chief Executive to the Clerk of the Eritrean Assembly, "Disputed Election - Assab and Southern Danakil," November 24, 1956.

²⁰ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14009/Eritrean Assembly Second Legislature Minute No. 16, December 6, 1956.

including the president of the Supreme Court, Sir James Shearer. Omar Akito was vindicated, and the fact that he obtained a majority vote his election was declared valid.²¹

The Chief Executive, however, refuting the Court's decision denied Akito's return to the Assembly. The decision of the Supreme Court did not allow Asfaha to call for a by-election to fill the void of Akito's seat in the Assembly. With Akito banned, his seat remained empty throughout the four years term of the Assembly until 1960. Asked about if that was the way he left the Assembly, Akito said:

I stayed out yes, but not end of story. I had the court order in my hand. I was the lawful representative. So I denied Asfaha the opportunity to replace me by his handpicked supporter. First, I refused to seek or accept other employment. I also let other people run my business in Assab. Second, I refused to leave Asmara. Third, every time that the Assembly was in session, I took my court decision with me and attempted to take my seat, only to be blocked at the gate on each attempt. If I had absented myself from this routine, it would have been interpreted as submission to their will and they would have gone ahead with a by-election to replace me. As it was, Asfaha did not dare to openly reject a Supreme Court decision. My seat remained empty throughout.²²

The 1956 election exhibited gross irregularities from the point of view of the electoral law to the management of the election itself. The determination of the Federal and Eritrean authorities to staff the Assembly with trustworthy members and the police repression directed against anti-unionist resulted in a substantial domination of the Unionists in the Assembly. Key opposition figures were sidelined and those quite a few new federalists who somehow managed to be elected were not in any position to influence the course of action in the Assembly.

5.2 The Assembly in office and the Crumbling of Eritrean Autonomy

Soon after the elections were over the Assembly took office to commence its work. In its first session of the second legislature on September 12, 1956, the Assembly reelected *Sheikh* Hamid Ferej Hamid, and *Melake Selam* Dimetros Ghebremariam to the post of president and vice

²¹ RDC/Box 11/ EA/HM/70/ Hon. Member Mohammed Omar Akito/Acc. No. 14135/"Judgment of the Supreme Court in the Election Petition of Mohammed Omar Akito," February 12, 1957.

²² Alemseged Tesfai, *In Memoriam Mohammed Omer Akito - Our Own Firebrand*, November 23, 2011. <http://ecss-online.com/2011/11/in-memoriam-mohammed-omer-akito-our-own-firebrand/>. Unsalaries, living in a little room behind the Grand Mosque of Asmara and hounded by the Government's spies, Akito looked into his Assembly seat from the streets. By his reckoning, it was the most difficult and most testing period of his life. His "term" in the Assembly came to an end in 1960 when general elections for the Third Legislature were called. After four years of stand-off against the mighty of the day, he declined to run for the Third Legislature. Akito died of illness in 2011.

president of the Assembly respectively. On the same day the Assembly reelected *Dejazmatch* Asfaha Weldemikael as the Chief Executive of the Eritrean Government.²³ Three days later Asfaha and his newly appointed six secretaries took the oath of office.²⁴

The results of the 1956 election provided Asfaha Weldemikael, whose real purpose was to realize the incorporation of Eritrea into the Ethiopian Empire, with the necessary tools to execute his mission. Having secured the confidence of the Assembly, he staffed influential Unionists to key positions in his government. His Secretaries were carefully appointed. The Department of Interior under *Dejazmatch* Araya Wassie and the office of the commissioner of police, headed by Colonel Tedla Uqbit, were in the hands of staunch Unionists. Colonel Tedla Uqbit, who was trained under the British and awarded his position through pressure from the federal government, was the key Eritrean figure in harassing anti-unionists. He was the one of most feared personalities in Eritrea, although the presence of Sir James Shearer as the head of the Eritrean Supreme Court sometimes compelled him to act within the law.

Another prominent figure in Asfaha's government who had campaigned for unconditional union and the submission of the Unionists to the Ethiopian crown was the vice president of the Assembly, a clergyman *Melake Selam* Dimetros Ghebremariam. Dimetros' fear of Islam's domination of Christianity in Eritrea brought him to be more ardent supporter of union with Ethiopia, which at the time was considered a Christian Empire. Dimetros had done his ecclesiastical studies in Gojam, Ethiopia. His devotion to Christianity and his fear of Islam were the main reasons behind his commitment to Ethiopia. The substantial financial support he received from the office of the Emperor's Representative and mainly from the Emperor's daughter, Princess Tenagne-Worq, for his organization known as *Mahbere Hawariate Fre Haymanot*, were some incentives which cemented his viewpoint.²⁵ Dimetros came to the post of

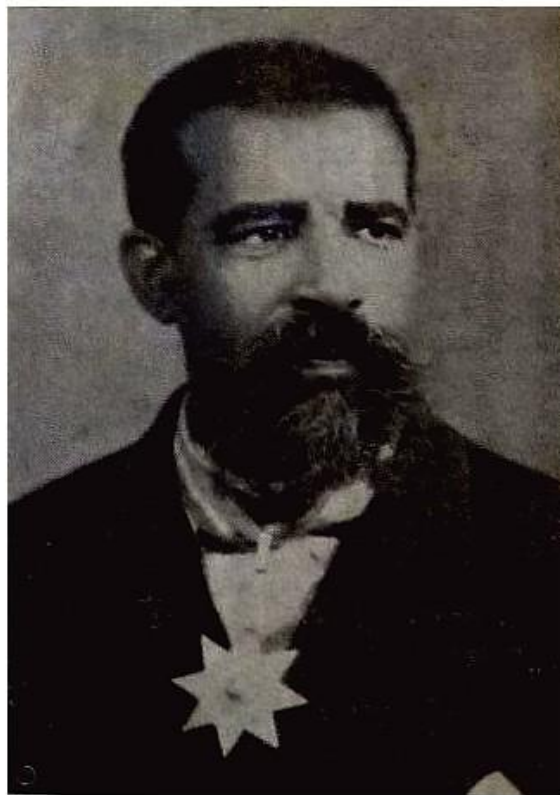
²³ RDC/Box 3/Eritrean Assembly/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14009/Eritrean Assembly Second Legislature Minute No. 1, September 12, 1956. The election gave the president and the vice president a one year tenure in office. On November 2, 1957, however, the Assembly, through vote, extended the mandate of the president and the vice president for another three years. See RDC/Box 3/Eritrean Assembly/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14009/Eritrean Assembly Second Legislature Minute No. 39, November 2, 1957.

²⁴ RDC/Box 3/Eritrean Assembly/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14009/Eritrean Assembly Second Legislature Minute No. 2, September 15, 1956.

²⁵ Interview with *Grazmatch* Shewit Desta, by Alemseged Tesfai, Asmara, October 4, 2012. *Grazmatch* Shewit was the personal driver of Dimetros. Dimetros thought if it was left to be an independent nation, Eritrea within a few decades would become a Muslim state. For him union with Ethiopia was the key solution to avert such a threat.

vice president of the Assembly in September 1955 by ousting *Blatta* Demsas Weldemikael to become the key personality in the Assembly, agitating for union with Ethiopia even surpassing the president of the Assembly. He played an influential role in organizing the Second Assembly to enact several constitutional amendments that reduced Eritrea's autonomy. The combined exertion of Dimetros, Asfaha and the Tedla Uqbit was instrumental to the realization of the Emperor's political aims in Eritrea and fatal to the life of the federation.

Melake Selam Dimetros Ghebremariam:
Vice President of the Eritrean Assembly (1955-1962)



Source: Hbret, January 22, 1963

Asfaha Weldemikael's second spell as Chief Executive was, therefore, the real kickoff of the dismantlement of the Federation. Attaining the helm of power through holding the posts of head of the Eritrean government and Vice Representative of the Emperor in Eritrea, he was in a commanding position to realize the Ethiopian and Unionists' ambition. Throughout the tenure of

The *Mahbere Hawariate Fre Haymanot* (Society of Apostles the Fruit of Faith) was a religious society and leading organ of the Orthodox Church engaged in publishing ecclesiastical works and building churches throughout Eritrea including in the Eritrean lowlands where Christianity has less influence.

the Second Assembly he spent most of his time in the palace (the headquarters of the representative) as vice representative, and in his office both as Chief Executive and vice-representative. Unlike the former Chief Executive, Tedla Bairu, he never acquiesced in the existence of two distinctive governments, one Eritrean and the other Ethiopian. According to him, Tedla Bairu's downfall was because he made "too much of Eritrea's status"²⁶. Asfaha perceived his prime duty as not to be obsessed too much with Eritrea's status, but to speed up the complete integration of Eritrea into Ethiopia. According to him Eritreans had to accept that they were bound to live under Ethiopian administration. Some of the democratic features which the UN resolution gave to Eritrea, however, were the main challenges for Asfaha job. In explaining his apprehension of the period Asfaha said: "If, through weakening the federation, we do not make the Eritrean people believe that they do not have a separate administration outside of Ethiopia, Ethiopian nationalism in Eritrea would decline when the people became more acquainted with Matienzo's constitution."²⁷

Bitweded Asfaha Weldemikael:
The Second Chief Executive of the Eritrean Government (1955-1962)



Source: Etiopia, August 14, 1955 (left) and Zemen, September 11, 1960 (right)

²⁶ Clark to State Department, 775A.00/8-3055, August 30, 1955, quoted in Tekie Fessehazion, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

²⁷ Zewde Retta, *Be Qadamawi Haile Sellssie Zemene Mengist Ye Ertra Guday 1941-1963* [The Affair of Eritrea in the Era of Emperor Haile Selassie I]. (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers, 2000,) p. 386.

The Eritrean Assembly, with the necessary Unionist majority, was in a favorable position to help Asfaha execute his mission. With the exception of few cases, the characteristics of the Assembly in protecting the autonomy of Eritrea that was witnessed during the first Eritrean Assembly totally vanished in the second Assembly. The Assembly was pressured and easily manipulated to pass legislations that fundamentally eroded Eritrea's autonomy. Many of the motions that the previous Assembly had refused to adopt were now passed easily.

Although documentary evidence was not found, Spencer noted that by 1957 the Eritrean Assembly came with another demand for union. Similar to that of the 1955, Spencer again claimed credit for saving the federation "once more I entered my opposition. The level of support by Egypt and Syria for dissident movement in Eritrea had now given rise to serious concern."²⁸ If Spencer is right, it was only the fear of Arab involvement in Eritrean affairs that prevented the Emperor from terminating the federal arrangement. Conversely, for G.W. Furlonge, the British ambassador to Ethiopia who visited Eritrea between November 11 and 24, 1957, what deterred the Emperor from taking the final step of ending the federation was "the risk of raising a hornets' nest for Ethiopia in the United Nations."²⁹ Furlonge believed that with advocates of union filling most key positions in the Eritrean government, the Eritrean Assembly, given its composition, could be made to vote for incorporation at any time.

During the spell of the second Assembly, the attack on Eritrean autonomy and its Constitution continued unabated. In November 9, 1957, *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai, the Emperor's Representative, advised the Assembly members that it was their duty, on behalf of the Eritrean people, to accept the newly promulgated Ethiopian Penal and Civil codes which were expected to go into effect on the occasion of Ethiopian liberation day on May 5, 1958. He told members: "The independence of a nation is evaluated in terms of its own laws and regulations. Laws proclaimed for colonial rule are like heavy chains round one's neck. Therefore, as children of a united Ethiopia, Honorable members, it is the duty of all of you and a mission entrusted to you

²⁸ John Spencer, *Ethiopia At Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Sellassie Years*. (Algonac: Reference Publications, Inc., 1984), p. 305.

²⁹ FO371/125539. Visit of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Eritrea, between the 11th and 24th of November, 1957, in Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 224. Furlonge perceived the presence of the President of the Supreme Court, Sir James Shearer an obstacle to any unconstitutional developments in Eritrea.

by the Eritrean people and your August Sovereign to endeavor to apply the uniform laws of Ethiopia."³⁰

Unlike the previous Assembly, the second Eritrean Assembly was reluctant to defend the Eritrean Constitution and challenge Andargachew Messai and Asfaha Weldemikael in the event of its violation. Conversely, the Assembly's performance and many of its legislations were to the appeasement of the Emperor's Representative. It was for this reason that Andargachew, on opening the first regular session of the Assembly in November 2, 1958, praised the members for "the cooperative spirit" they showed and for not promulgating legislation which his office would be compelled to return to the Assembly for reconsideration. He told Assembly members:

In the past year all the legislations on which you deliberated and voted have come to me in accordance with the law for promulgation and I did not meet any occasion upon which I had to return any of these laws for reconsideration. I have given my assent to act which was brought to my attention. This fact has clearly demonstrated, beyond any shadow of doubt, what I have always wished for you. That is, apart from the fact that through experience you have acquired the necessary skill, you are clearly more conscious of the national welfare and are being guided by such high principles. I have thus been enabled to take notice of your just spirit. I trust that the spirit of cooperation and understanding among you shall continue to exist.³¹

By 1958 the Federation was at dusk. The year witnessed several peaceful protests against the Eritrean and Federal governments. The response of the Eritrean police and the federal authorities was an active and brutal suppression of the protests. Under such circumstances, at the end of the year, the Chief Executive pushed through a motion known as "The Eritrean Flag, Seal and Arms (Amendment) Act, 1958". The motion demanded that the Ethiopian flag to be the sole official flag of Eritrea and get rid of the Eritrean flag which was adopted in 1952 with the emergence of the Federation.

While proposing the change of the Eritrean flag the Chief Executive sent a letter to Assembly members in which he advised members that it was erroneous to let Eritrean flag flown while

³⁰ RDC/Box 3/ Eritrean Assembly/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14009/"Speech from the Throne delivered by H.E. *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai, Representative of His Imperial Majesty in Eritrea, on the occasion of the First Regular Session of the Eritrean Assembly", November 9, 1957.

³¹ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14010/"Speech from the Throne delivered by H.E. *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai, Representative of His Imperial Majesty in Eritrea, on the occasion of the First Regular Session of the Eritrean Assembly," November 2, 1958.

there was a flag which Eritreans should respect as their own. He also informed members that they were part and parcel of Ethiopia. His words read:

As a flag is an expression of a people's feeling, separating a single people with two different flags does not have any use but inflicting moral and physical damage on them. ...my beloved brothers, Eritrea is a natural part of Ethiopia and we are Ethiopians. We are citizens of His Excellency, the Emperor. The country that we ought to love, serve, defend, and even sacrifice our life to it, is one Ethiopia. Hence, since a flag is symbol of a country's unity, in which flag are we going to defend this country in the time of peace or war? The flag of Eritrea should be nothing but the one which was flown since thousands of years and the one with the Green, Yellow and Red colors. I know this feeling is imprinted in the hearts of everyone of you. Hence, I am honored to present this proposed law to you which I believe you will approve in unity.³²

On December 24, 1958, the Assembly, which had become the tool of the palace, passed the bills that the previous Assembly had declined to adopt. The Assembly considered Asfaha's draft and voted supporting the "The Eritrean Flag, Seal and Arms (Amendment) Act, 1958" to replace the Eritrean flag with the Ethiopian one.³³ This was another bold step that undermined Eritrea's autonomy and marked the real beginning of the end for the Federation. The Assembly's action of substituting the Eritrean flag with the federal one was identical to dissolving the legal entity it signified. Reporting the event, the British Consul-General in Asmara wrote that "the change will not be popular with the Muslim element of the population or with some Copts, and ...the bill was hustled through the Assembly without any advance notice so as to allow the Muslim Deputies no time to reflect".³⁴

Covering the Assembly's bill to eradicate the Eritrean flag which allowed the Ethiopian colors to be flown, the Unionist's organ *Etiopia* referred to the Eritrean flag as a "cancer that was attacking the Ethiopian flag" and advice its readers that "as of this date we ought to be proud of our freedom." The existence of the Eritrean flag was described as something which represented "one

³² *Zemen*, "Historical Act of the Eritrean Assembly: Changeover of the Flag of Eritrea with the Ethiopia Flag Legislated," (Translation) December 25, 1958.

³³ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14010/Eritrean Assembly Second Legislature Minute No. 89, December 24, 1958.

³⁴ Quoted in Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 132. The report was sent to British Embassy in Addis Ababa and to the Foreign Office in London.

people with two flags."³⁵ For the Chief Executive, the Ethiopian flag was the one which the Eritrean forefathers were using and a historic one.³⁶

By the end of 1958, the Chief Executive was all powerful and the Assembly toothless. Asfaha, as vice-representative, began to sign official documents granting exemption from federal tax.³⁷ With the Emperor's Representative, Andargachew, appointed Minister of Interior of Ethiopia, Asfaha took over as the Emperor's Representative until December 1959, when Brigadier-General Abiy Abebe, another son-in-law of the Emperor, was appointed the new Emperor's Representative in Eritrea.³⁸

**Brigadier-General Abiy Abebe: The Emperor's Representative
in Eritrea (1959-1962) Addressing the Eritrean Assembly**



Source: Zemen, November 4, 1960

³⁵ *Etiopia*, "History Gave Birth to History," (Translation) December 28, 1958.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Tekeste, *op. cit.* , p. 133.

³⁸ Zewde Retta, *op. cit.* , p. 509. After the federation he was Governor General of Eritrea between 1963-1964.

As of 1958 the merger of Eritrea into the Empire was a question of time. The Eritrean constitution had practically ceased to exist. The federation was alive only to give Ethiopia the chance to prepare itself to take charge of full integration. The federal and Eritrean authorities, including the Eritrean Assembly, were ready and willing eradicate the remaining elements of the federation. On September 10, 1959, the process of incorporating Eritrea into the Empire gained another momentum. As Andargachew claimed, the "heavy chains round one's neck" were thrown away. The Assembly adopted the "Penal Code (Extension) Act, 1959" which repealed the Eritrean Penal Laws and substituted them by the Penal Code promulgated in Ethiopia by proclamation No. 158 of 1957.³⁹ Furthermore, the two countries' taxation systems were integrated to give pace to the race of ending the federation.

The next bold step towards the abolition of the Eritrean constitution took place in mid-1960. The Eritrean Assembly again voted on an amendment that severely undermined the autonomy of Eritrea and the Constitution. In a letter sent to the President of the Assembly, the Chief Executive called the need to change the legitimate name of the Eritrean government. According to Asfaha, this was due to a "confusion" in the English and Tigrinya versions of the Constitution. He thus advised the President of the Assembly that as Eritrea was federated under the crown of Ethiopia it was erroneous to use words such as "Government" and "Chief Executive" in the Eritrean government. The correct terms, according to Asfaha, were "Eritrean Administration" and "Chief Administrator".⁴⁰

Following the Chief Executive's proposal, in its meeting of May 17, 1960, the Assembly considered "The Flag, Seal and Arms (Amendment) Act 1960" and voted unanimously in favor of it. The motion called to change the name "Eritrean Government" to "Eritrean Administration" the word *Merah Menghisty* (Chief Executive) in Tigrinya be amended to read *Teklal Ammahadaray* (Chief Administrator); and the Eritrean seal be altered to read "Eritrean Administration under Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia."⁴¹ A week earlier, on May 9, 1960, a major attack on Eritrean cultural identity had already been made. Amharic, in replacing

³⁹ RDC/Box 19/A/ACT/41/Eritrean Assembly/Acc. No. 14291/The penal Code (Extension) Act 1959.

⁴⁰ *Zemen*, May 19, 1960.

⁴¹ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14010/Eritrean Assembly Second Legislature Minute No. 137, May 17, 1960.

Tigrinya and Arabic, was declared Eritrea's official language.⁴² This crippling of Eritrean autonomy signaled the distance to formal integration into the Empire was not far.

The reluctance of the Eritrean government and the Assembly to act on a drafted electoral law was seen again in May 1960. A couple of months before the election for the Third Assembly, on May 18, 1960, the Assembly voted for the application of Proclamation 121 of 1952 to be used as the electoral law for the upcoming elections. The difficulty of compilation of the necessary statistical data pertaining population size, the number of the electorate and similar other particulars were presented as the main challenges to enact the new electoral law.⁴³ Practically speaking, however, the enacting of the electoral law meant the upcoming election would be held in a direct way, which would create problems for the government to easily control it. The government preferred the existing system as it was more convenient to control a few indirect votes than a direct election that involved the entire people and which might result in undesired results. On July 14, 1960, the stint of the Second Eritrean Assembly officially came to an end, with the major pillars of Eritrean autonomy severely diminished.

Why did the Assembly Paralyze? Some Explanations

Unlike the First Eritrean Assembly, the Second was easily manipulated by Asfaha Weldemikael and the Federal authorities to simply erode the Eritrean autonomy and strengthen the Ethiopian position in Eritrea. As we have seen, the ground to end the federal arrangement was eventually prepared through several of the Assembly's legislations that undermined Eritrea's autonomous status. The central question here is, why did the Assembly become toothless?

Principally, the Second Legislature of the Eritrean Assembly was staffed with people carefully selected for a purpose. The 1956 election played the decisive role in allowing the Chief Executive and Federal authorities to staff Unionists and other loyal subjects in the Assembly. Furthermore, unlike the First Assembly, the majority of members in the Second Assembly were not up to the complex task entrusted to them. Lack of education, limited political awareness and

⁴² Ellingson, *op. cit.*, p. 187. Although Amharic was declared official language in 1960 it was introduced much earlier since 1956 in the Eritrean school curriculum. According to the vice president of the Assembly, Dimetros Ghebremariam, after Amharic was made official language of Eritrea around 80,000 Tigrinya books were taken from Eritrea to Addis Ababa. However, he does not know what happened to them. Some people presume they were burned in Ethiopia. See Bocresion Haile, *The Collusion on Eritrea*. (unpublished book, 2000), p. 233.

⁴³ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14010/Eritrean Assembly Second Legislature Minute No. 139, May 18, 1960.

less acquaintance with complex assembly politics were some of the stumbling blocks for the proper functioning of the Assembly. Even though most of the members of the Assembly were literate in either Arabic or Tigrinya or both, few had more than an elementary education and did not fully understand assembly procedures and functions. Thus, it became easy for the Crown's representative to manipulate the Assembly. According to former Assembly member, *Grazmatch* Ahmed Saleh Barole, the majority of the members did not actually know their mandate as Assembly members. With the exception of a few who were familiar with the procedures of Assembly politics, the Assembly was composed of members who thought their mandate was to just satisfy the government. Hence, whatever motion the government proposed should automatically be ratified. They did not realize that they were operating in a legislative position.⁴⁴ This emanated from the lack of awareness and insufficient exposure to education.

Nonetheless, there were quite a few anti-unionist delegates who would try to question matters which they perceived wrong or unconstitutional. The chance to express their view, however, was very slim. Members believed to be in the opposition yard were systematically silenced in the Assembly. A federalist member of the Assembly *Kegnazmatch* Sunebara Damana recalls: "you cannot articulate your opinion, you can do nothing, they [Unionists] make you like a fool. Although you would like to raise some concerns, you cannot do it. Whenever you attempt to speak they know who you are. So that you will not allowed to speak. You would get no chance of speaking properly. They propose the closure of the idea with the so-called Article 13."⁴⁵

Awarding members extra-traditional powers and bribery were some of the other reasons behind the weakness of the Assembly. Appointed by the government, the majority of members of the

⁴⁴ RDC/Acc. No. 05001, Ref. L0037, Interview with *Grazmatch* Ahmed Saleh Barole, by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Addi Keyih (Eritrea), April 29, 1991. *Grazmatch* Barole was a member of the Second and Third Legislatures of the Eritrean Assembly.

⁴⁵ Interview with *Kegnazmatch* Sunebara Mahmud Damana, by Alemseged Tesfai, Asmara, March 11, 1997. According to the standing orders of the Assembly a member could propose a closure of a motion or an idea and issue had to be settled in a vote. Article 13 of Standing Orders of the Assembly reads: (1) A member may at any time propose the closure of debate on a particular subject. The motion shall then be put immediately to the vote and if a simple majority of votes is recorded in favor, the debate shall be closed. On closure of the debate a vote shall immediately be taken on the subject in question. (2) A member may also propose the postponement of debate on a particular subject, in which case a vote shall be taken on the motion as prescribed in paragraph 1 above. In the event of a favorable decision the Chairman shall determine a time for the resumption of debate on the subject in question. The Assembly's Standing Orders which was created in accordance with the provisions of article 20 (1) of Proclamation No. 121 of 1952 possessed 26 Articles that governed the internal operation of the Assembly. RDC/Box 20/Acc. No. 14320/Representative Assembly of Eritrea: Standing Orders, 1952.

Assembly exercised traditional powers as District Chiefs, *Meslenes* and *Nazirs*.⁴⁶ In violation of the Eritrean constitution, they were appointed by the Chief Executive to combined double roles in the government, operating both as chiefs in their respective areas and as members in the Assembly. Practically, people appointed to a government job would be dependent on the government to securing their position and would not be expected to object the government. Fearing to lose either their post in the Assembly or their traditional power, members were reluctant to question the actions of Eritrean and Federal authorities. In the delicate economic situation of the period, members were also dependent on their double salaries for living. Besides, their traditional posts were also a source of pride and influence in their respective communities that they did not dare losing. In these circumstances, operating against the will of the Eritrean and Federal authorities meant losing such privileges.

One case was exemplary. Assembly member *Bashai* Fesseha Weldemariam recalls that another member, who initially agreed to support him to raise an issue in the Assembly to claim Eritrea's share of revenue from internal communications, later changed his mind for fear of losing his position. He told him: "I have no option. I am a *Meslene* with 150 salary, I receive 150 'salary of the humble', and 450 [sic 350] as an Assembly member. They [the government] also cover my hotel expenses when I come from my village to the Assembly. Your idea was good. But supporting you in the Assembly would mean to lose all of this. I was called and threatened, I won't support you. I have got an order."⁴⁷

According to *Bashai* Fesseha, those members who had nothing to lose due to the fact that they were only members of the Assembly, were also lured with tempting cash. Fesseha claimed that he at one time was tempted with 2000 Ethiopian Dollars to stop his opposition in the Assembly.⁴⁸ In his specific political style, the Emperor was also active, as an act of encouragement, in awarding numerous titles to loyal subjects. In November 1958, in gratitude

⁴⁶ *Meslenes* are traditional authorities in Christian areas while *Nazirs* are in Muslim area.

⁴⁷ RDC/Acc. No. 00680, Ref. BA/103/88, Interview with *Bashai* Fesseha Weldemariam, by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, June 25, 1988. All the amount of salary are in Ethiopian Dollar. Salary of the humble was the payment instantly made from the Palace of the Emperor's Representative. However, those entitled to it were only those in line with the Federal and Eritrean governments.

During the Assembly session period, members who reside outside Asmara were responsible to arrange themselves where they would be staying and had to finance themselves.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

for his services, he awarded the President of the Assembly, *Sheikh* Hamid Ferej Hamid, a title of 'Ethiopian Grand Officer'.⁴⁹ Other members were also bestowed several traditional titles.

***Sheikh (later Dejazmatch) Hamid Ferej Hamid:
President of the Eritrean Assembly (1955-1962)***



Source: Zemen, November 5, 1958

Another mechanism used to secure the services of Assembly members in a way that fitted the government was the use of naked force. When the few outspoken members refused to comply, they were brought to the attention of the Eritrean Police Commissioner, Tedla Uqbit, who intimidated them for non-compliance. Hence, members were afraid to resist the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments. Fearing imprisonment and other measures they chose to be quite. If you crossed the line, said *Kegnazmatch* Sunebara "you were called by him [Tedla Uqbit] and

⁴⁹ *Zemen*, November 5, 1958. The picture below was taken when *Sheikh* Hamid Ferej was awarded the title of "Ethiopian Grand Officer" by the Emperor.

threatened and admonished."⁵⁰ Tedla Uqbit threatened any member who was believed to be in the opposition. He was the most fearful person of the era and active in suppressing the opponents of Ethiopia.⁵¹

A police report illustrates that by 1958 all personalities that were believed to have an influence in Eritrean politics were under close scrutiny and secret police surveillance. The surveillance targeted not only the active members of the Assembly, but also those members in the First Legislature. The ex-president of the Assembly, Idris Mohammed Adem, Mohammed Omar Akito who was denied his seat in the Assembly, and Fesseha Weldemariam, an active federalist in the Second Assembly, were among the targets. Even key Unionist figures and other senior officials in the Eritrean government such as Haregot Abbai, Ali Radai and Omar Hassano were subject of the secret surveillance.⁵²

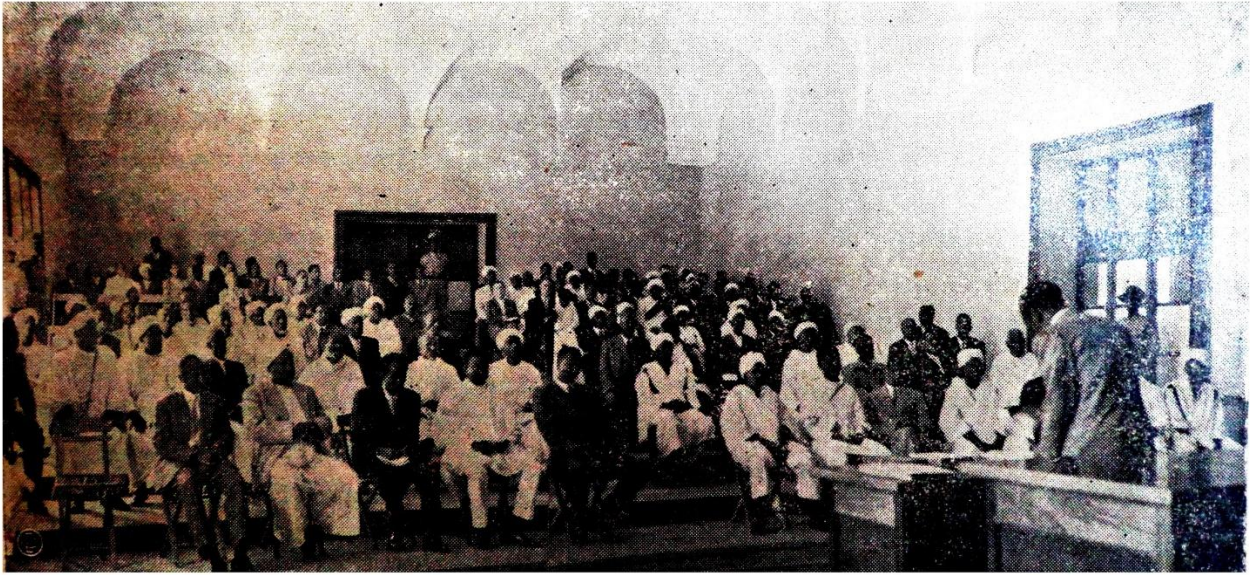
Since coming to power in 1955, Asfaha Weldemikael's power grew substantially. During the tenure of the Second Assembly the Chief Executive and the Representative of the Emperor, *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai were in a more commanding position to dismantle the Federation. To the delight of the federal authorities, Asfaha went much further than Tedla ever did in implementing Ethiopia's wishes. Indeed, he was successful in creating a rubber stamp Assembly that became truly the tool of the Palace. Demand for the respect of Eritrea's autonomy and resistance to Ethiopian hegemony, however, did not cease to exist. It was not demonstrated in the Assembly, but came from outside.

⁵⁰ RDC/Acc. No. 05086, Ref. Su/93/90, Interview with *Kegnazmatch* Sunebara Mahmud Damana , *op. cit.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Assembly member *Bashai* Fesseha Weldemariam also revealed the Police Commissioner was rampant in threatening members who failed to collaborate with the government. See RDC/Acc. No. 05084, Ref. SU/91/90, Interview with *Bashai* Fesseha Weldemariam, *op. cit.*

⁵² RDC/Box 125/INT/S/B/11/Vol. IV/Acc. No. 15172/ "Police Secret Activities 1958/1959." The police investigation monitored each and every activity of these people and with whom they had contact with.

The Eritrean Assembly in Session (September 1956)



Source: Zemen, September 13, 1956

5.3 Resistance to Ethiopian Hegemony

With activities of the Muslim League and other anti-Unionist groups curtailed, resistance to Ethiopian hegemony was expressed in different forms. One of these came from exiled leaders. Weldeab Weldemariam, whose legitimate election to the First Eritrean Assembly was annulled by the First Chief Executive of Eritrea, Tedla Bairu, was exiled via the Sudan to Egypt in 1953, after he suffered the seventh assassination attempt on his life. By 1956 he had started to broadcast a radio program from Cairo. Through his Tigrinya program, Weldeab criticized the Ethiopian government and propounded the cause of Eritrean independence. His broadcast had a remarkable influence in the Christian dominated highlands where the Unionists had their stronghold. Weldeab's program was also influential among the youth. Weldeyesus Ammar, who later became one among the leading figures in the Eritrean armed struggle said: "People recounted to us the radio broadcasts of Weldeab Weldemariam from Cairo which we did not hear when they were broadcasted originally, as we had then been too young. We were making heroes out of Weldeab and Ibrahim Sultan."⁵³

The attempt of the Eritrean government, through its official organ *Zemen*, to publicly denounce Weldeab's activities and the support to his broadcast from Nasserite Egypt indicates the level of

⁵³ Günter Schröder interview with Weldeyesus Ammar, Mulheim, Germany August 12, 1989.

impact of the broadcasts and the apprehension of the Eritrean and Federal authorities.⁵⁴ The Ethiopian Ambassador to Egypt perceived the imminent danger of Weldeab earlier, when in 1954 he sought asylum in Egypt. The Ambassador addressed a letter to the Emperor's Representative, *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai, to discuss the way in which he could oppose Egypt's consideration of Weldeab's request.⁵⁵

In October 1957 Mohamed Omar Kadi, former member of the Federal Council, and Weldeab Weldemariam prepared a detailed memorandum in denunciation of Ethiopia's policy towards Eritrea. The petition was presented to the UN Secretary General, the President of the General Assembly and to the representatives of UN member states. As Weldeab was denied a US entry visa Omar Kadi travelled alone to submit their memorandum. The memorandum broadly described how the Federal Act and the Eritrean Constitution were undermined by the joint efforts of the Ethiopian authorities and the Eritrean government.⁵⁶

The memorandum called for the UN's immediate attention to the Eritrean case. In the complaint Kadi said that "Eritrean autonomy has been replaced by annexation; democratic liberties were suppressed and the federal system was fundamentally deformed." He added that during the last five years the Eritrean people "have suffered at the hands of the Ethiopian government, masquerading as a federal government, more than they have endured during 70 years of colonial oppression".⁵⁷ Kadi spent six weeks in the United States where he explained to representatives of UN members the nature of his complaint. He called on the UN to establish a commission of enquiry "to examine on the spot the grievances of the Eritrean people". Kadi urged "the UN, which disposed the destiny of Eritrea, should enquire into the facts of our complaint in order to find out whether its resolution has been actually carried out or utterly abrogated."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ The September 1 and 6, 1956 issues of *Zemen* provided a detailed condemnation of the Radio Cairo program of Tigrinya.

⁵⁵ RDC/ETH/BIO/43.04/Weldeab Weldemariam/Letter of The Ethiopian Ambassador in Egypt to *Bitweded* Andargachew Messai, 945/3/46 dated Megabit 16 1946. The corresponding date for the letter which was inscribed in the *Geez* calendar is March 24, 1954.

⁵⁶ RDC/Box 124/IN/S/A/17/Acc. No. 15163/"The Complaints of the Eritrean People Against the Ethiopian Government being a list of the flagrant violations of the UN Resolution 390 A (V) and the Federal Act". The memorandum has seventy-six pages.

⁵⁷ RDC/ETH/BIO/43.04/Weldeab Weldemariam/Ref. No. 77/Press Release "Eritreans Charge Ethiopia Annexing their Country" New York, November 29, 1957.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

While Omar Kadi engaged in distributing the memorandum in the US, he was approached by the Ethiopian Ambassador to the US and persuaded to return to Eritrea. The Ambassador promised Omar Kadi that he could discuss the problem with the Emperor. Weldeab recalls what the Ethiopian Ambassador told Omar Kadi: "Why don't you submit your petition to the Emperor? Why do you defame Ethiopia here and disgrace the Emperor. This is a simple issue, as Eritreans and Ethiopians we can solve it among ourselves."⁵⁹ Halting his activities in the US, Omar Kadi returned to Eritrea. While passing through Cairo he informed Weldeab he was also offered a chance to reconcile with the Emperor, to which Weldeab declined. Once in Eritrea, Mohamed Omar Kadi was immediately put under police surveillance. His action had apparently provided the fanatic police commissioner, Tedla Uqbit, enough reason to remove him from Eritrea's political scene. While in Cairo, Omar Kadi had pronounced in a radio interview that Eritrea was being ruled by a black colonial power, an act that was interpreted as treason. By March 1958, on the basis of the information supplied by Tedla Uqbit, a criminal charge against Omar Kadi was filled by the Federal Attorney General.⁶⁰

In the lowlands, the charges against Omar Kadi were answered with immediate protest and demonstrations. The action of Federal authorities led the Western Province into a general strike. The Muslim League's strongholds of Keren, Aqordat and Massawa were rocked by demonstrations. The protests in Keren were violent: 12 people were wounded by the police and more than one hundred arrested. The protests in Aqordat was answered with the arrest of more than one hundred and the dismissal of several chiefs from their posts by the Eritrean government. These protests were also reinforced by strikes in Massawa.⁶¹ Protesting against the charges

⁵⁹ RDC/Acc. No. 06802, Ref. W15, Interview with Weldeab Weldemariam by Eritrean People's Liberation Front, Department of National Guidance, August 31, 1987.

⁶⁰ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 129. Omar Kadi had a written guarantee provided by the Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States that he would not face any difficulty from the Emperor for his action. Returning from Cairo he also met the Emperor who assured him that he would not be harassed by the police.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.129-130. Commenting on the incidents, the British Consul-General wrote "the troubles in Keren and Aqordat would probably have not occurred" if the authorities had been less high-handed with Omar Kadi. While the Eritrean government and the federal authorities were drafting charges against Omar Kadi, the Italian Consulate-General informed his British counterpart that "attempts have been made recently at Senafe and Aqordat to form two groups of armed dissidents." While, the Aqordat group, according to the Italian source, succeeded in becoming established, at Senafe, the attempt collapsed for lack of arms. See Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

against Omar Kadi and the actions of the police to the strikes in Keren, the Muslim League and the Federalist Youth Association of Eritrea sent a telegram to the Emperor.⁶²

The protests in the lowlands continued in the highlands with different grounds. On March 8, 1958, the Eritrean Assembly enacted the draft of the Chief Executive, the "Employment Act, 1958", which stripped off workers' rights instituted by the British Administration and later amended by the Assembly's Labor (Amendment) Act of 1956. Article 84 of the new Act, contrary to article 33 of the constitution, required trade unions to obtain the formal recognition of the Chief Executive for their existence and empowered him to annul trade unions, without appeal, if he found that the organization ceased to advance the object of the association. Its leaders would be expelled and new ones, elected in turn, would have to apply for recognition again.⁶³ On March 10, 1958, the Eritrean Labor Union Federation, which went underground after its dissolution in 1953, staged the biggest and most violent demonstration ever seen in Eritrea. The strike according to government sources involved five thousand people. It was staged for five days, between March 10 and 14, 1958 and completely paralyzed Asmara and Massawa.⁶⁴ Acknowledging the damage the strike inflicted on the economy the government called workers to return to their duties.⁶⁵ At the end, however, the strike was brutally suppressed, with nine persons killed and 534 wounded. The Labor Union was outlawed and its leaders imprisoned. The strike, which undoubtedly was political, was staged against the economic and political repression by the Ethiopian government.⁶⁶ It was also a response to the detention of some of the signatories of the March 5, 1958 memorandum to the Emperor.⁶⁷

Following the Asmara strike, eighteen prominent Muslims including Omar Kadi were arrested, for sending a petition, on October 1957, to the UN protesting Ethiopian violations of the UN

⁶² The petition to the Emperor, sent on March 5 1958, was signed by eighteen Eritreans, nine Muslims and another nine Christians. FO371/13125.Copy.Telegram. Asmara 5.3.1958. (Memorandum Submitted by the Muslim League and Federalist Youth Party of Eritrea), in Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 227. The Federalist Youth Association of Eritrea was established in October 1953 under the guidance of Mohammed Omar Kadi. Its principal aim was to look after the proper implementation of the Federal Act and monitor the works of the Eritrean Assembly and the Eritrean government. The chief leaders of the association were Tesfai Redae and Abraha Hagos. Omar Kadi played an advisory role. See N.A., *Medrekh Federeshn 'n Gobeta Ertra B'Etyopian 1950-1962*. (Orota: NP, N.D.) p. 45.

⁶³ *Medrekh Federeshn 'n, op. cit.*, p. 85. See also Ellingson, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220. Article 33 of the Eritrean constitution explicitly stated "Everyone resident in Eritrea shall have the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests."

⁶⁴ *Zemen*, March 23, 1958.

⁶⁵ *Zemen*, March 14, 1958.

⁶⁶ RDC/ETH/BIO/43.04/Weldeab Weldemariam/Ref. No. 77/"The Truth about Eritrea".

⁶⁷ Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

Resolution 390 A (V). The Federal authorities brought criminal charges against three of the eighteen who had signed the petition to the UN appealing for a review of Eritrea's status, "with interfering in federal jurisdiction" regarding internal disputes. They were charged with "communication with foreign governments without the authority of the federal government" and with "conspiring to bring accusations against the Ethiopian government." The charged were very influential personalities within the Muslim community: Omar Kadi, was a former member of the Federal Council; Suleiman Ahmed, the brother of the Mufti of Eritrea; Imam Musa, president of the Muslim League for Asmara and Hamasien, though the party's activity was halted earlier. Omar Kadi was sentenced to ten years in prison. The leaders of the Muslim League, whose "crime" was signing a petition, Suleiman Ahmed and Imam Musa, were each sentenced to four years imprisonment, while the others were incarcerated for short terms or released on bail.⁶⁸ The Eritrean Assembly, raised neither the demonstrations in the lowlands and the strike in Asmara nor the cases of Omar Kadi and the other leaders as an issue of discussion.

The case of Omar Kadi and other leaders of the Muslim League illustrates the level of cooperation among the Eritrean and federal authorities in hammering any political opinion that went against the attitude of both governments. The severity of the punishment also indicated how both governments wanted to show the way any similar attempt in the future would be dealt with. It was an indication of the policy of no tolerance to any compromise on the way the federation was operating and to any of the appeals the Eritrean groups would send to the UN or any outside body.

The message of muffling Eritrean resentment to Ethiopia and mainly targeting Muslim League senior figures compelled nationalists to explore other forms of resistance. The case of Omar Kadi and the senior figures of the Muslim League was probably the prime case that convinced anti-unionist forces to deal the Ethiopian government through armed resistance.

Fearing reprisal from the Federal authorities and the Eritrean leadership, formal opposition was dwindling. Grass-roots resentment against the Empire and the federation, however, was expressed in the lyrics of popular songs. The bafflement among locals over the increasing harshness of life under the federation was voiced:

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 130-131. See also Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 90-91.

Ata Ane'ye Gerimuni (I am amazed at what's happening)
Marca Indieto' do N'kheid Mesiluni I never thought we would go backwards in history
Kabzi Khulu's Mussolini'do Me' Hasheni? Would Mussolini have been better for me?⁶⁹

While the Emperor's grip on Eritrea strengthened and the country was turned into a police state, attempts to resist Ethiopian power continued. Perhaps the first organized opposition to Ethiopian domination was exhibited when a much organized clandestine movement, the *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea*⁷⁰ or the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM), was formed on November 2, 1958. The ELM, founded by Mohammed Said Nawud in Port Sudan, was a secular and socialist-oriented movement whose principal aim was to declare the independence of Eritrea through a coup d'état and abolishing the federation. The ELM focused on building national unity among all Eritreans on the basis of a secular, democratic government.⁷¹ Hence, it recruited many Muslims and Christians, several of whom were employed in the Eritrean government.

In 1959 political and economic conditions in Eritrea were going downward. Like the Muslim communities, members of the Federalist Youth Association also became targets of the commissioner of police. To exacerbate the political repression, a serious famine caused by locusts hit the country. American grain aid was crucial in minimizing the impending severe impact of the famine. Other conditions, however, were worsening throughout the year.⁷² The Ethiopian government was continuing the gradual but successful takeover of Eritrea. Full annexation was a question of time. To borrow the words of the American Consul, Looram, Eritreans were entering "a sinister and tragic phase." For him Ethiopia's annexation of Eritrea was a form of African colonialism which he found deplorable. Looram noted: "It (annexation) seems parenthetically to be but an aspect of African colonialism or irredentism, which is apparently developing elsewhere on the continent and which in some instances may eventually

⁶⁹ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 91. This is a verse of a Tigrinya song from the late 1950s which was popular in the *Bet-Shahi* (tea-houses) and *Inda Suwa* (beer-houses) of Asmara.

⁷⁰ *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea* was the Arabic name of the movement. Among Tigrinya speakers it was known with *Mahber Shew'ate* which means 'Association of Seven'. This name was given after its secret cell structure which composed seven people. Each member of a cell do not know other members in his cell. His mission was to recruit another seven people who do not know one another they are in a single cell. The organization's rationale behind this recruitment policy was to protect itself from falling into the traps of the Ethiopian intelligence.

⁷¹ Günter Schröder, interview with Mohammed Said Nawud, Khartoum, November 14, 1980. The movement which operated in secrecy, held its second congress inside Eritrea in Asmara at the end of 1959. According to Nawud, the ELM's second strategy was to declare an armed movement if it failed to succeed in its prime strategy of staging a coup. The ELM's initial work is believed to have contributed to the success of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), a militant front formed in September 1960 to declare Eritrea's armed struggle for independence a year later.

⁷² Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

make European colonialism look tame. Moreover, Ethiopian domination of Eritrea gives the curious and lamentable picture of a regime of less advanced people taking over the country of a more advanced."⁷³

The actions of the Federal authorities and the Eritrean police frightened opposition figures. The departure of the President of the Supreme Court, Sir James Shearer⁷⁴ in 1959 also gave the police commissioner, Tedla Uqbit, who is remembered for his ruthless suppression of actual and anticipated dissension, a free hand to jail anybody with impunity. Fearing repression, many politicians were beginning to consider exile. In March 23, 1959, assisted by Eritreans in the Sudanese army, Ibrahim Sultan, founder and leader of the Muslim League, and Idris Mohammed Adem, former President of the Eritrean Assembly who was forced to resign in 1956, escaped through Tessenei to the Sudan and later proceeded to Cairo. Egypt thus became the center for exiled Eritrean politicians. In Cairo Ibrahim Sultan, Idris Mohammed Adem and Weldeab Weldemariam agitated for support. They appealed to several of the embassies in Egypt. They also began to tour the Middle East to gather political and material support for the Eritrean cause. Having the deaf ear from the UN and the Western powers, these nationalists consider the Arab world would be more interested to listen to the Eritrean case which by the time was considered a Muslim majority nation. The prime focus was Saudi Arabia where Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem met King Saud and later the Crown Prince Faysal. Apart from Saudi, they also visited Syria, Somalia and Yemen.⁷⁵

By 1960 any sign of visible opposition to the Ethiopian government was hard to find in Eritrea. With prominent opposition figures in exile and some in jail, resistance against the final dissolution of the federation was slender. Securing the unwavering loyalty of the Chief Executive, the silence of the feeble Assembly and above all the fanatic activities of the devoted police commissioner, the federal authorities were at ease to terminate the Federal arrangement.

⁷³ Looram to State Department, 775.00/09-259, September 2, 1959, quoted in Tekie, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

⁷⁴ Shearer who had significant contribution to the life of the Federation left Eritrea and the Supreme Court after seeing off his contract in 1959. In 1957, for his demand on the strict application of the Eritrean Constitution and his challenges directed towards the Eritrean and Federal authorities, he was referred as "watchdog" of the Eritrean Constitution by the British Ambassador to Ethiopia. See FO371/125539. Visit of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Eritrea, between the 11th and 24th of November, 1957, in Tekeste, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

⁷⁵ Günter Schröder, interview with Idris Mohammed Adem, Khartoum, March 15, 1989. Idris Mohamed Adem stated that by December 1959 they made a decision to form an organization to resist Ethiopia. Idris Mohammed Adem later played a crucial role in the establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Front in 1961. He was one of the founders and first chairman of the Front.

When the tenure of the Second Assembly approached its ending in mid-1960, it was clear that the life of the disgruntled federation was not to run long.

Conclusion

Having tested with a band of federalist caucus during the stint of the first Eritrean Assembly, the Eritrean and Federal authorities chief effort during the elections for the second Assembly was to block the return of this group, that stuck by the proper implementation of the Federal Act, to the Assembly. Not surprisingly, the 1956 election eliminated all the anti-unionists elements of the first Eritrean Assembly that demonstrated a stiff challenge to the Eritrean and Federal authorities. Therefore, as compared to the first, the second Eritrean Assembly was much more to the liking of the Ethiopian government. To meet Ethiopia's political desire, the role of key Unionists officials of the Eritrean government, principally the Chief Executive, the vice president of the Assembly and the Commissioner of Police, was instrumental. To make sure that every seat in the Assembly was filled with loyal subjects the Eritrean and Federal authorities played an active role. This included enforcing Proclamation 121, harassing candidates and electorates, as well as bribing voters in some instances.

Erected in such circumstances, the Assembly became the tool of the palace. In its four years' term in office it enacted many laws that severely reduced the autonomy of Eritrea. A couple of these legislations were raised but repudiated in the considerations of the first Assembly. The Second Assembly failed to protect Eritrea's autonomous status within the federation primarily because it was, unlike the previous one, filled with more Unionist elements whose avowed aim was unconditional union with the Ethiopian Empire. Besides, most of its members who were traditional chiefs were not well acquainted with the complex assembly system of politics. The Assembly was also composed of members who were bribed with different incentives, which made the Assembly in effect a rubber stamp assembly. Rewarding members with double functions in the government as members in the Assembly and Chiefs in their respective localities also well served the interests of the Emperor. The intimidation, specially by the Commissioner of Police, directed against those members reluctant to cooperate also contributed to the feebleness of the Assembly.

Seeing the Assembly becoming the instrument of Ethiopia, Eritrean opposition to Ethiopian encroachment developed and expressed itself in different forms. Several individual leaders and groups agitated for the protection of Eritrean autonomy. These were expressed through appeals, strikes and demonstrations. The Eritrean and Ethiopian governments replied to all these with repression, a course of action that probably convinced Eritreans that the way to resist Ethiopian hegemony and its instruments in Eritrea might have to be through armed resistance.

Chapter Six

The Third Eritrean Assembly and the Dissolution of the Federation (1960-1962)

Introduction

This chapter deals with the most decisive and final years of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation and its dissolution. I will briefly review the 1960 elections for the third and final Eritrean Assembly and examine the way the federation was terminated. In doing so I will scrutinize Ethiopia's role and the strategy it employed in ending the federal arrangement. I will also assess the role of the Eritrean Assembly and other Eritrean political actors on the overall process.

6.1 The 1960 Elections

As we have seen in chapter five, in its final days, the Second Eritrean Assembly approved the applicability of Proclamation 121 for the elections of the Third Eritrean Assembly. With Chief Justice Sir James Shearer, the 'constitutional watchdog', no longer available in the Supreme Court and key opposition figures in exile and some in jail, the pro-Ethiopian Chief Executive was at ease to declare his electoral law. Unlike the case in the 1956 election, this time nobody dared to ask for the institution of the Electoral High Commission to supervise the elections of September 1960. Accordingly, in June 1960, the Chief Executive provided the Eritrean Assembly Election Rules of 1960 with an Official Notice No. 312/60.¹ This electoral law was a mere repetition of Proclamation 121 with a change in name and some minor modifications. Similar to Proclamation 121 it empowered the Chief Executive as the main authority to uphold elections.

According to the official notice, the balloting had been set for September 5, 1960 which was later extended for two more days to include September 6 and 7. Apart from restructuring in the Keren division, the allocation of seats was similar to that allotted for the second Eritrean Assembly. This time the Keren division was separated into two to become the Keren and Sahel divisions.

¹ RDC/Box 17/FED/A/Act/7/Acc. No. 14260/Official Notice No. 312, The Eritrean Assembly Elections Rules, 1960, June 30, 1960.

Hence, the 1960 allocation of seats was, Akele Guzai 12, Seraye 12, Hamasien 7, Keren 7, Sahel 8, Aqordat 8, Massawa 3, Assab 2; Asmara city 7, Massawa city 2.²

The 1960 elections in which 148 candidates contested for sixty-eight seats was more or less a recurrence of the 1956 election. In Asmara 17,318 and in Massawa 3,972 people voted. In Muslim dominated lowlands, with the exception of the Assab division, candidates were elected unopposed (i.e. sole candidates ran for their constituency). In Assab division, five candidates contested two seats. In the highland there were a few cases in which candidates were elected unopposed.³

The end result of the 1960 elections was pleasing to the federal and Eritrean authorities. The majority of members served in the second legislature had been re-elected.⁴ A few members of the previous Assembly perceived as "disloyal" were sidelined and some uncooperative new candidates were outlawed. During the 1960 elections a simple bicycle accident could nullify a candidate of his eligibility if he was not wanted into the Assembly.⁵ Hence, an Assembly which would offer little resistance, if any, to the Emperor's plans of annexation was returned to office.

On the first meeting of the Assembly, on September 12, 1960, the three 'king's-men', Asfaha Weldemikael, Hamid Ferej Hamid and Dimetros Ghebremariam, were re-elected to the post of Chief Executive, President and Vice-President of the Eritrean Assembly respectively.⁶ While informing the Emperor of his and the Assembly members' election success, Asfaha Weldemikael declared the new members of the Assembly were all to the liking of the Emperor and assured him that no single opposition member was elected to the Assembly. In his letter to the Emperor, Asfaha wrote:

with the help of God and Your Majesty's grace, the election to the Eritrean Assembly and the Administrator [referring himself] concluded in a good way. As it was explicitly demonstrated to everyone, this election attributed an Ethiopian spirit. The contest was held by inquiring who would be more loyal to the Emperor

² Ibid.

³ RDC/Box 87/INT/A/4 Vol. V/Acc. No. 14936/"Results of the 1960 General Election".

⁴ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14012/Eritrean Assembly Third Legislature Minute No. 4, November 3, 1960.

⁵ RDC/Box 87/INT/A/4 Vol. V/Acc. No. 14936, "Letter of Solomon Khasai to the Emperor's Representative, the Chief Executive, and the Eritrean Assembly," September 10, 1960. Although Solomon Khasai's candidature was initially accepted in the district of Tslima, his presence in the Assembly was unwanted by authorities. He was later pronounced disqualified for an earlier case of a bicycle accident he had. Representing the district, Unionist's Uqbe Haile entered the Assembly unopposed.

⁶ RDC/Box 11/EA/HM15/Acc. No. 14088/Eritrean Assembly Third Legislature Minute No. 1, September 12, 1960.

and the country. When the Assembly convened after the election days, due to my amenability to you, members elected me without any opposition and with a big applause. Although, it was made for formality, I would be courageous to say it was You, Your Majesty, who appointed us all.⁷

The Third Eritrean Assembly was inaugurated after key pillars of Eritrean autonomy were dismantled during the tenure of the Second Assembly. Hence, under the guidance of the Eritrean Chief Executive, the main chore expected from the new Assembly was to finalize what had been initiated by its predecessor. As the country was turning into police state, many Eritreans knew that this was their last Assembly in the Federation. Their autonomy would be declared over any time soon either with an imperial decree or through a resolution from the Assembly.⁸

6.2 Fleeting Lifeline to the Federation

During the stint of the Second Eritrean Assembly, Emperor Haile Selassie could easily have pushed forward the termination of the federal arrangement but refrained from doing so. This was partly for the fear of international reactions but the main reason was his ambition over Somalia. On several occasions his chief ministers, Aklilu Habteweld and Weldegiorgis Weldeyohannes, advised the Emperor to keep the federation alive. This was in a hope that it would attract the Somali who were in British and Italian trusteeship to join the empire in a similar arrangement to that of Eritrea. This hope, however, faded away following the independence of Somalia in July 1960. Henceforth, there was no reason to maintain the federation.

One development that possibly extended the life of the federation was the December 1960 Imperial Guard's coup d'état against the Emperor. This abortive coup was staged while the Emperor was on a state visit to Brazil. He had to land in Asmara and stay there until matters settled down in his capital, Addis Ababa. Brigadier-General Assefa Ayena of the Air Force, Generals of the Army Merid Mengesha and Kebede Gebre, and the Emperor's Representative in

⁷ Zewde Retta, *Be Qedamawi Haile Sellssie Zemene Mengist Ye Ertra Guday 1941-1963* [The Affair of Eritrea in the Era of Emperor Haile Selassie I]. (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers, 2000,) p. 515.

⁸ Tekie Beyyene, *Kab Riq-Hfnti: Poletikawi Tezekrotatey Kab Mefarq Hamsatat Ksab Felema Semanyatat* [Fist from Barn: My Political Memories from Mid-1950s to Early 1980s]. (Asmara: Hdri Publishers, 2009), p. 4. According to Tekie Eritrea's autonomy was gradually diminished and the tense political atmosphere and the events in the period were indicating that the federation would be dissolved soon. He also stated that many Eritreans believed that the UN Federal Resolution binds the federal association of Eritrea with Ethiopia for a maximum of ten years, after which many expected a referendum to decide the fate of Eritrea. Therefore, many believed that the Third Eritrean Assembly would be staying only two years in office.

Eritrea, General Abiy Abebe, helped to restore the Emperor to power.⁹ While still holding his post of the Crown's representative in Eritrea, Abiy Abebe was promoted to Lieutenant-General for the role he played in crushing the coup. He was also appointed Interior Minister of Ethiopia and spent the year 1961 in Ethiopia consolidating the Emperor's government. In the early months of 1961, therefore, Eritrea was not a concern for the Emperor. He was busy in Ethiopia securing the maintenance of his regime. With General Abiy absent from the political scene of Eritrea, the Chief Executive, *Dejazmatch* Asfaha Weldemikael, who was promoted to *Bitweded*, had to run the office of the Emperor's Representative in addition to being the head of the Eritrean government.¹⁰

Another key development that deterred the Emperor and his agents in Eritrea from terminating the autonomous status of Eritrea was the formation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and its declaration of an armed struggle against Ethiopia. By 1961 Eritrea was in a state of revolution. Anti-Ethiopian sentiments were growing, and were manifested in the form of demonstrations and strikes. The ELM, operating clandestinely, was active in recruiting more members and was behind most of the demonstrations and strikes featured against the Ethiopian grip. It was these movements that had prepared the setting for an armed struggle and the emergence of a more organized militant organization, the ELF. Established by Eritrean exiles in Cairo in 1960, the ELF declared the Eritrean Armed Struggle by September 1961. This marked the beginning of the longest guerilla war in Africa. At the forefront of its political leadership the ELF had Idris Mohammed Adem, former President of the Eritrean Assembly, who lost his post in 1956 for insisting the institution of an independent electoral commission to supervise the elections for the Second Eritrean Assembly and giving wide publicity to the decision of the president of the Supreme Court, Sir James Shearer, which was in favor of the commission's formation.¹¹

⁹ John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia At Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Selassie Years*. (Algonac, Michigan: Reference Publications, Inc., 1984), pp. 317-318. Spencer claimed by 1960 there was great animosity towards Haile Selassie's rule among the educated classes of Ethiopia.

¹⁰ Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, p. 517. In February 1961 Abiy Abebe was promoted from Brigadier-General to Lieutenant-General at the same time he was appointed Interior Minister of Ethiopia replacing *Ras* Andargachew Messai, the former Emperor's representative in Eritrea. The Eritrean Chief Executive, Asfaha Weldemikael, who was given the title of *Dejazmatch* when he assumed the post of the Chief Executive of the Eritrean government in 1955 like his predecessor, *Dejazmatch* Tedla Bairu, was bestowed *Bitweded*, the highest civilian title in Ethiopian feudal hierarchy below prince. Asfaha Weldemikael was the sole Eritrean to have this title from the Emperor. *Zemen*, February 15, 1961.

¹¹ Idris Mohammed Adem was actively working for the formation of an armed front opposing Ethiopia ever since he left Eritrea in early 1959. In 1960 the core leadership that formed the ELF actively toured the Middle East and

The declaration of the armed struggle was the climax of the confrontation that developed throughout the federation years. While concluding his book, the former British Administrator of Eritrea, G. Trevaskis, warned Ethiopia that it would be in Ethiopia's own interest, as well as Eritrea's, for the federal arrangement to survive in the way it was devised. His advice was prophetic: "It is for Ethiopia to make her choice. The temptation to subject Eritrea firmly under her own control will always be great. Should she try to do so, she will risk Eritrean discontent and eventual revolt, which, with foreign sympathy and support, might well disrupt both Eritrea and Ethiopia herself."¹² This was exactly what came about after Eritrea was reduced to an Ethiopian province. ELF's declaration of armed resistance and its growing guerilla activities, mainly in the Western lowlands, somehow delayed the termination of the federation.

6.3 The Assembly Under Pressure from the Eritrean Public and the Crown

The third Eritrean Assembly's tenure in office was dominated by two polarizing demands that originated from the Eritrean public and the Ethiopian government. While the Ethiopian government was pushing for the integration of Eritrea to the Empire and preparing the Assembly for early union, the Eritrean public was engaged in challenging the Assembly to be firm to the Ethiopian demand and called on the Assembly to refrain from further damaging the Eritrean autonomy.

A week after the Assembly took office, secondary school students staged a demonstration in Asmara demanding the restoration of the Eritrean flag, seal and arms which the previous Assembly had abolished. The strike was possibly organized by the clandestine movement, the ELM. Ethiopia's gradual dismantlement of Eritrean autonomy was labeled as an act of colonialism, and calls, through leaflets, were made to the people to resist Ethiopia.¹³ Several

amassed support from the Arab world. Guns and ammunitions were smuggled to Eritrea via the Sudan and Yemen. Initially, the military wing of the ELF led by Hamid Idris Awate had a few dozen men who had experience in the Sudanese army. Such a small beginning of armed resistance, however, rapidly turned into nationwide uprising. The ELF was inspired by the Algerian Liberation Front which was fighting against the French.

¹² G.K.N. Trevaskis, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition 1941-52*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 131.

¹³ RDC/Box 125/INT/S/B/1/Vol V/ Acc. No. 15173/ "Police Secret Activities 1960". One anonymous leaflet found in the streets of Asmara reads: "a people without a flag and a government is a colonized people. Vie through demonstration and reinstate your right. Everything is after freedom. With no freedom there is no respect. Without struggle there is no victory. Your right, is not a gift to expect, you realize it through struggle. We demand the right to: (1) Our flag (2) Name and Seal of our Government (3) Our freedom of Press".

protesting students were arrested and stayed several months in prison. Some were even sent to Ethiopia to serve their prison terms.¹⁴

According to the reports of the Ethiopian intelligence in Asmara the Eritrean Assembly was divided into two camps: those who claimed that the federation should be terminated with the Assembly's vote, and those who believed that it should be done with a referendum.¹⁵ The public was convinced that the Assembly would be made to vote anytime. An indication of such belief was seen when on July 1961 members of the Assembly received an anonymous threatening letter. While Christian members received the letters written in Tigrinya, Muslim members received it in Arabic. The letter, warning Assembly members, reads: "You are playing against rights of the Eritrean people. You dishonored all our laws. Do not mistakenly understand that the Eritrean people is sleeping. It is counting on you in all this. But this shall end one day. In that case you will be punished with serious cruelty, with no mercy and forgiveness".¹⁶ The President of the Assembly later reported the matter to the police. This was done to frighten off Assembly members from further collaborating with the Emperor's policy in Eritrea. Sometimes public pressure on the Assembly was expressed through the public's physical presence in the Assembly building. Habitually, the public was free to attend the Assembly's sessions, and secondary school students were the main attendants. According to the Ethiopian Intelligence report, "a gesture of fright" was noticeable among members of the Assembly resulting from the panic public attendants at the Assembly meeting.¹⁷

While the Assembly was under pressure from the Eritrean public four influential men were actively working to end the federation. These were Lieutenant-General Abiy Abebe, the Emperor's representative who had considerable power in Eritrea; Asfaha Weldemikael, the Chief Executive of the Eritrean government, a man of significant influence in Eritrean politics; *Abba*

¹⁴ RDC/ETH/BIO/43.04/Weldeab Weldemariam/Ref. No. 77/"The Truth about Eritrea". See also Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 91.

¹⁵ RDC/Box 10/ETH/SEC/151/01/Report of Major Taye Metchia to the Emperor's Representative, June 25, 1953.

¹⁶ RDC/ETH/INT/36/01/Ethiopian Intelligence Report, 25/07/1953. The anonymous letter was sent to the members via the mailing address of the Assembly. The report mentioned the letter was sent on 25/7/1953 in the Ge'ez calendar. The corresponding date in the Gregorian calendar is August 2, 1961. Two days later another report claimed that Solomon Uqbe, a student from *Luel Mekonen* Secondary School, was arrested. He later admitted to Ethiopian Intelligence agents, that it was the students that send the letter to threaten Assembly members. See RDC/ETH/INT/36/01/Ethiopian Intelligence Report, 27/7/1953 (August 4, 1961).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Dimetros Ghebremariam, Vice President of the Eritrean Assembly, and *Blatta* Kumllachew Bellete, director-general of the Federal Administration and later HIM's assistant representative in Eritrea. According to Ellingson every evening, especially in the final years of the federation, Kumllachew had telephone communication with the Emperor, reporting recent developments and the activities of Eritrean leaders. He distanced himself from most of the Eritrean officials and members of the Assembly. At the end of 1961, fifteen Assembly members accused him of abusing his authority and interfering in Eritrea's affairs and asked in a signed, but unsuccessful petition to the Emperor to have him removed from his post.¹⁸

Abba Dimetros Ghebremariam was perhaps the most active enemy of the federation. During the spell of the Second Eritrean Assembly, *Abba* Dimetros, together with Asfaha Weldemikael, played an active part behind the enactment of many of the legislation that the Assembly passed to diminish Eritrea's autonomy. Dimetros' activities in carrying out the Emperor's policies engaged in callous tactics that stimulated fear and hatred among many Eritreans towards him. During the Assembly elections he was influential in weighting the balance for candidates to take assembly seats. On October 30, 1961, he survived an assassination attempt by Ghebremedhin Hailu, who had been obstructed by him from taking his seat in the Assembly. Besides, *Abba* Dimetros had also successfully prevented Ghebremedhin from assuming his old post in the government's internal revenue service, which he was obliged to renounce in order to run for the Assembly seat. During his attack, Ghebremedhin was wounded in his belly and hospitalized. The assassination attempt on *Abba* Dimetros involved several individuals. Hence, in order not to divulge a secret, Ghebremedhin tore open his stitches and died. Showing the mounting unpopularity of *Abba* Dimetros, a great number of Eritreans attended the funeral of Ghebremedhin.¹⁹ According to Matthew Looram, the then American Consul in Asmara, "the

¹⁸ Kumllachew had come to Eritrea with the beginning of the Federation in 1952 and gradually rose to become HIM's assistant representative in June 1960 and awarded the title of *Blatta*. See Lloyd Ellingson, *Eritrea: Separatism and Irredentism, 1941-1985*. (Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1986) p. 190. See also Tekie Fessehatzion, *Eritrea: From Federation to Annexation 1952-1962*. (Unpublished Working paper, Eritreans For Peace and Democracy), 1990, p. 43.

¹⁹ RDC/ETH/INT/36/01/Ethiopian Intelligence Report, "Notice from the Intelligence Office" October 31, 1961. According to Ethiopian intelligence report of October 31, 1961 the assassination attempt was made by two men - Ghebremedhin Hailu, and Yohannes Uqbazghi. The incident happened in the vicinity of the vice president's house around 4:30 AM while he left for church. Two bombs were thrown, the first at the car of the vice president and the second at his guards, who wounded both the assassins and rescued *Abba* Dimetros. One of Dimetros' guards died of the wound he suffered in the attack and three others were wounded. Later on, in connection to the assassination attempt, Tsehayye Abraha, Ghirmai Mirach and Sibhat Abbera were arrested by the Eritrean police. Another

General feeling [in Asmara] was one of regret that the vice-president of the Assembly had escaped unscathed."²⁰ Looram added "the assassination attempt...constitutes a warning to the Ethiopian government and its instruments in Eritrea to be more prudent in pushing their annexation policies here and in trying to rig local elections to suit their purposes...But whether or not the warning will be heeded is another matter."²¹

The vice president was not frightened by the attempt in his life. Rather he became more energetic to execute the Emperor's plan of annexing Eritrea. A few days after the assassination attempt, rumors were circulated among the members of the Eritrean Assembly that *Abba* Dimetros was setting up a move in the assembly to end the federation. Fearing this, the Assembly abruptly adjourned the session until November 18.²²

On May 26, 1962 the vice president again became the target of a political assassination attempt. Having visited Aqordat in the Western Province he proceeded further south to Shambuqo to participate in a religious ceremony. While in Shambuqo, the local police received an anonymous letter of threat against the life of the vice president, an event that compelled *Abba* Dimetros and his group to return via a different road with mules. The cars returned back empty on the regular road.²³ Back in Asmara, *Abba* Dimetros also received some anonymous letters threatening to damage a printing shop he owned. The police had to keep an eye on the shop. All these threats against the vice president of the Assembly was due to his race to abolish the federation and his effort of satisfying the Emperor. According to Ethiopian Intelligence reports, it appears that the vice president was "sticking his nose in several questions which were completely out of his jurisdiction." The report also claimed the general discontent among the Eritrean public at that time was not directly against Ethiopia, but rather against the local administration, mainly against the Assembly, the Chief Executive and the vice president of the Assembly.²⁴

Ethiopian Intelligence report of November 14, 1961 stated that the Eritrean Chief Executive, Asfaha Weldemikael was also target of a political assassination by the same group. According to the report, several Eritreans that resided in Addis Ababa had close connection with this group and were the sources that supplied the group with weapons. RDC/ETH/INT/36/01/Ethiopian Intelligence Report, "Notice from the Intelligence Office" November 14, 1961. See also Ellingson, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²⁰ Matthew Looram, American Consul, Asmara, to the Department of State, Washington DC, USA, no. 775.00.00/11-1561 (November 15, 1961), quoted in Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Ellingson, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²³ RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 159, "Eritrea - Miscellaneous," June 9, 1962.

²⁴ RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 148, "Eritrea/Asmara: The General Situation," May 31, 1962.

In contrast, as least as of April 1961, *Sheikh* Hamid Ferej, president of the Eritrean Assembly, was suspected of playing a double role. According to a report of Ethiopian Intelligence in Asmara, in April 1961 he had contacts with exiled Eritrean opposition figures such as Ibrahim Sultan. The president and another member of the Assembly, *Sheikh* Osman Abdurahman, met Ibrahim Sultan at the Eritrean-Sudanese border, where Ibrahim urged the president of the Assembly that he had to work hard to preserve federation and to make every attempt to extend its life. He also advised the president not to fall into the Ethiopian trap of entitlements and incentives. One concern during their meeting was to discuss *Abba* Dimetros' engagement in the acquisition of more land concessions intended to create Christian settlements in the areas of the "Baria" (the Nara ethnic group) and the Beni-Amer, which are Muslim areas.²⁵

Several subsequent reports indicated that the president of the Assembly was highly suspected of playing anti-unionist role. The Chief Executive, who was informed of the issue, found it hard to accept the charges against Hamid Ferej. According to Ethiopian intelligence sources, at times in which the Assembly was not in regular sessions, Hamid Ferej was seen to plot against the Emperor's plan in his native Aqordat. He used to hold several informal meetings and gatherings with chiefs of the Western Province, mainly among those in Barka region. It seems that for this reason the Ethiopian intelligence department recommended the president's placement to Addis Ababa during the holiday times of the Assembly.²⁶

In the beginning of 1962 annexation seemed imminent. Simultaneously, grass-roots resentment towards Ethiopia's policy, the Eritrean leadership and the Assembly grew rapidly. Anger directed against the deputies was expressed in those days' popular couplets. One of the famous couplets warning Assembly members goes:

²⁵ RDC/Box 10/ETH/SEC/151/01/"On the Political inclination of Hamid Ferej, June 28, 1953 (July 5, 1961)". According to the report the meeting was held in April 1961 near mount Abu Gemel in the district of Tessenei. Those present in the meeting from Aqordat were Hamid Ferej - President of the Assembly, Osman Abdurahman - member of the Assembly, *Nazir* Dawud of Asfada, Omar Nashif *Wekil* (agent) of Aflanda, *Nazir* Adem Suleiman chief of Aqordat. Those came from the Sudan were former leader of the Muslim League, Ibrahim Sultan, Hamed Afendi and Abu Hamid.

²⁶ RDC/ETH/INT/36/01/Ethiopian Intelligence Report, "Report from an agent in the Western Province," July 4, 1961. The Intelligence department suggested that in the days where the Assembly was off, Hamid Ferej should be called to Addis Ababa with any reason and be given some work in the palace which could systematically detached him from contacting his groups in his native Aqordat.

Assembleia B'Haki F'redu
Kabti Reshan B'dehan K'twerdu

MP's do the right thing
So that you may leave your offices safely.²⁷

Impelled by rumors that the Eritrean Assembly was considering a resolution to end the federation, on May 23, 1962, hundreds of high school students held a demonstration demanding Eritrean freedom and accountability from the Assembly. They also boycotted their studies. The strikes and refusal to attend school resulted in the arrest of many of the students by the police, and some fled to the Western Province.²⁸ The American Consul noted that "it was a surprising and courageous move in this police state. Symptomatic of general discontent... this incident was apparently triggered off by a widespread rumor that the Eritrean Assembly was about to vote for full union with Ethiopia."²⁹ For the greater part of May 1962 all the secondary schools in the country were closed due to demonstrations. Looram stated that the act of the students was "presumably to encourage -if not to frighten- the Assembly members in order that Ethiopian pressures would be resisted."³⁰ The students' intention of attending the upcoming Assembly sessions was perceived a threat by the police. According to Intelligence reports, their presence in the Assembly would be a kind of 'silent threat' to the Assembly.³¹

It seems under such threats from the public and having heard of the ELF's activities that the Assembly was uncharacteristically reluctant to obey the Chief Executive. In May 1962 the unpopularity of the Chief Executive was mounting, and some more tension was felt in the Eritrean Assembly. Several motions submitted by the Chief Executive regarding the budget were defeated by the Assembly. Members who were cowardly to directly resist the Chief Executive's motions showed their opposition in a different fashion. To avoid voting in favor of his proposals, several members left the Assembly hall before the actual voting process.³²

²⁷ Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 92. This was a Tigrinya verse that was popular around 1961 in several beerhouses in Asmara.

²⁸ RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 146, "Eritrea - Manifestations of students," May 29, 1962.

²⁹ Matthew Looram, American Consul, Asmara, to the Department of State,, Washington DC, USA, No. 775a.00./5.2562 (May 25, 1962), quoted in Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 146, "Eritrea - Manifestations of Students," 29/05/1962. The report advised the police should not forbid the students from attending the June 30 Assembly session and from entering the Assembly building as the action might turn them to go out for another demonstration.

³² RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 137, "Eritrea - The General Situation," May 24, 1962. According to the report, on May 23, 1962 the Chief Executive was seen in Asmara in company of General Abiy Abebe and was received by cat-calls from the people. The theme of these calls was "down with Asfaha, the Ethiopian slave".

The Crown's Strategy of Enlisting Support for Union

The Ethiopian government was considering two options to bring about the full integration of Eritrea into the Empire. The first was for the Emperor to declare unilaterally that Eritrea had become an Ethiopian province. The other option was to engineer a request for union to come from the Assembly. This would show that the initiative came from the Eritrean people and that Ethiopia was merely accepting to the wishes of the Assembly, which "represented" the people. The later strategy was the most convincing for Ethiopia. With the growing anti-Ethiopian sentiment of Eritreans, the Emperor's government, however, knew that securing a vote from the Assembly would not come easily.

In preparing the ground for Ethiopia's final acquisition of Eritrea, the Emperor repeatedly visited Eritrea in 1962. These visits were aimed at convincing Eritreans of the benefits of union as well as ingratiate Assembly members and other Eritrean government officials. The Emperor's first extended visit to Eritrea since 1960 came in January 1962, a trip in which he was accompanied by the empress and the royal family, including the crown prince. During this visit, he reportedly handed out over a million Ethiopian dollars.³³

The Emperor's second visit to Eritrea occurred in June 1962. This was a visit in which he put on "a magnificent campaign to prepare the Eritreans for early union."³⁴ The Emperor spent two weeks in Eritrea, between June 15 and 28, in which he travelled the whole territory, dispensing again large sums of money everywhere he went.³⁵ He even agreed to raise Eritrea's share of the customs receipts from \$4.7 million to \$6 million. In his massive campaign of ingratiating Eritrean elites the Emperor bestowed several titles and promotions, ranging from *Balambaras* to *Dejazmatch*, to Assembly members, administrating authorities and traditional Eritrean chiefs. Medals and titles were conferred to all but seventeen of the "obstructionist" members of the Assembly.³⁶ President of the Assembly, Hamid Ferej, was given the title of *Dejazmatch* and all

³³ Ellingson, *op. cit.*, p. 253. Ellingson did not mention to whom the money was distributed. Probably it was to the Eritrean Government which was in a serious budgetary crisis and security problems.

³⁴ Looram to Stat Department, Airgram A-1, June 3, 1962, quoted in Tekie, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁵ The Emperor's visit commenced in Assab and the tour covered the entire Eritrea. In his visit the Emperor was accompanied by the royal entourage including Prince Asfawesen, *Ras* Emru, *Dej.* Asrate Kassa, *Tsehafe* Taezaz Tefera Werk Kidaneweld, *Blatta* Girmachew Weldehawariat, Ketema Yifru, *Dej.* Merid Beyene, Major-General Iyasu Mengesha, Major-General Weldeselasie Bereka, Kidane Mariam and Colonel Aseffa Demssie. See *Etiopia*, June 17, 1962. *Zemen*, June 15, 1962.

³⁶ Tekie, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

the Cabinet Secretaries of the Eritrean government were named *Fitawrari*. Similar favors were dispensed among other key people, mainly district chiefs. All in all, the Emperor awarded titles to 112 people, thirteen of whom became *Dejazmatch*, eighteen *Fitawrari*, nineteen *Kegnazmatch*, and sixty-two *Grazmatch*, and an additional 134 people were decorated with other Ethiopian titles.³⁷ Furthermore, the Emperor promoted twenty-three of the top officers of the Eritrean Police Force. Tedla Uqbit, the police commissioner, was raised from colonel to Brigadier-General. Tedla Uqbit was also named along with the assistant Emperor's Representative, *Blatta* Kumllachew, commander of the order of the Honor of Ethiopia.³⁸ With the imperial government determined to end the federation once and for all, this was a strategy employed to soften up any anti-union stand among Eritrean elites, including members of the Eritrean Assembly.

Title and Promotion Awarded Eritrean Elites. Asmara Palace, June 1962



Source: Zemen, June 28, 1962

The Eritrean elites, however, were not the sole targets of the Emperor's campaign. In his trip to Keren in the Western Province, he promised large contributions for building two hospitals and to increase telephone communications for Muslim areas. In a clever attempt of restoring his

³⁷ *Zemen*, June 30, 1962.

³⁸ *Zemen*, June 27, 1962. Apart from Tedla Uqbit, the Police Commissioner, four officers of the Eritrean Police were promoted to Colonel, seven to Lieutenant-Colonel and eleven to Major.

popularity among the peasantry, he exempted rural Eritrea from paying the annual tribute for the previous two years and took upon paying the cost himself.³⁹

Parallel to this, showing the military might of Ethiopia was part of the Emperor's visit to Eritrea. On June 25, 1962, a Commando of the Second Division of the Ethiopian Army staged a military parade at the heart of Asmara. The parade was attended by US army officers of the Kagnev Station and several of the diplomatic corps in Eritrea.⁴⁰ This was to let Eritreans know that union was imminent and that Ethiopia was not a power that could be resisted.

While the crown was thus heavily engaged in an orchestrated preparation for union, the Emperor's loyal subjects in the Eritrean government planned to instigate a vote in the Assembly. The Chief Executive claimed that, in June 1962, the vice president of the Eritrean Assembly, *Abba Dimetros*, proposed that the Assembly be convened for a vote to end the federation and the Emperor, who was in Eritrea, should be asked to approve the Assembly's decision. Asfaha and the Emperor's Representative Abiy Abebe forwarded the proposal to the Emperor. At the discretion of his Prime Minister, Aklilu Habteweld, however, the Emperor declined to accept the proposal. But he instructed the Chief Executive and his representative in Eritrea to visit his capital to study the proposal and its execution.⁴¹

On the eve of his departure from Asmara, on 27 June, the Emperor addressed the Eritrean people and made a parting speech at the Asmara palace. His speech stressed the historical link of Eritrea to Ethiopia and the advantages to be achieved from close cooperation in defying "foreign invasion." In an attempt to reduce the apprehension of the Muslim sections of Eritrea, he lectured on the alleged absence of discrimination against Muslims both in Ethiopia and Eritrea. He further claimed that during the decade of the federation years around 75 million Ethiopian dollars had been spent on Eritrea's economic development. Hitting at dissident elements, he denounced the ELF as an act of banditry for private reasons and a "tool of foreigners." He made no mention of the federation or the Eritrean government. Repeatedly referring to Eritrea as "this part of Our empire", at the end of his address the Emperor insisted that the unity of the two countries was

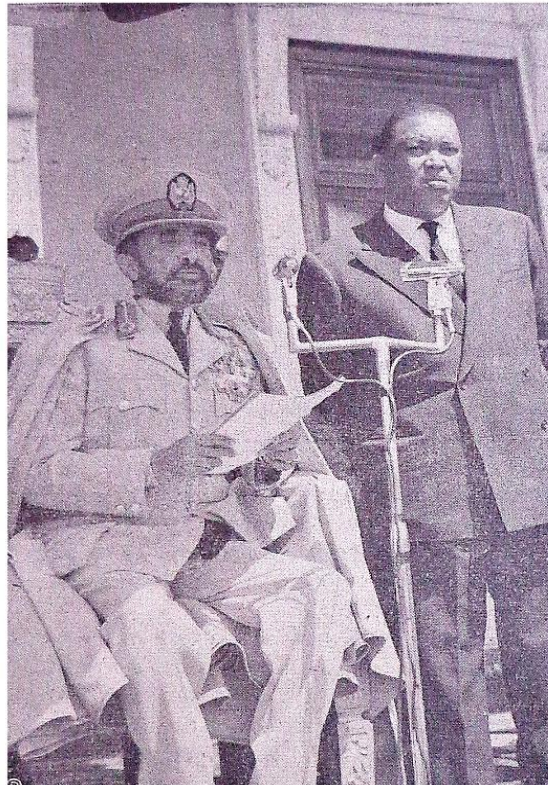
³⁹ *Zemen*, June 26, 1960. The two hospitals were promised to the Aqordat and Sahel division but never materialized. Due to locust invasion, most farmers had been unable to meet the annual tribute to the Eritrean government.

⁴⁰ *Zemen*, June 27, 1962.

⁴¹ Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, p. 525. The Emperor communicated the proposal to Aklilu, who advised him to reject the move sensing that if the move materialized while the Emperor was in Eritrea it would appear to the world as the Emperor's unilateral abrogation of the federation.

essential for the development and liberation of the two territories. "As We have repeatedly mentioned it, We again explain it to you to recognize that union is the eternal pillar for development, civilization and freedom."⁴²

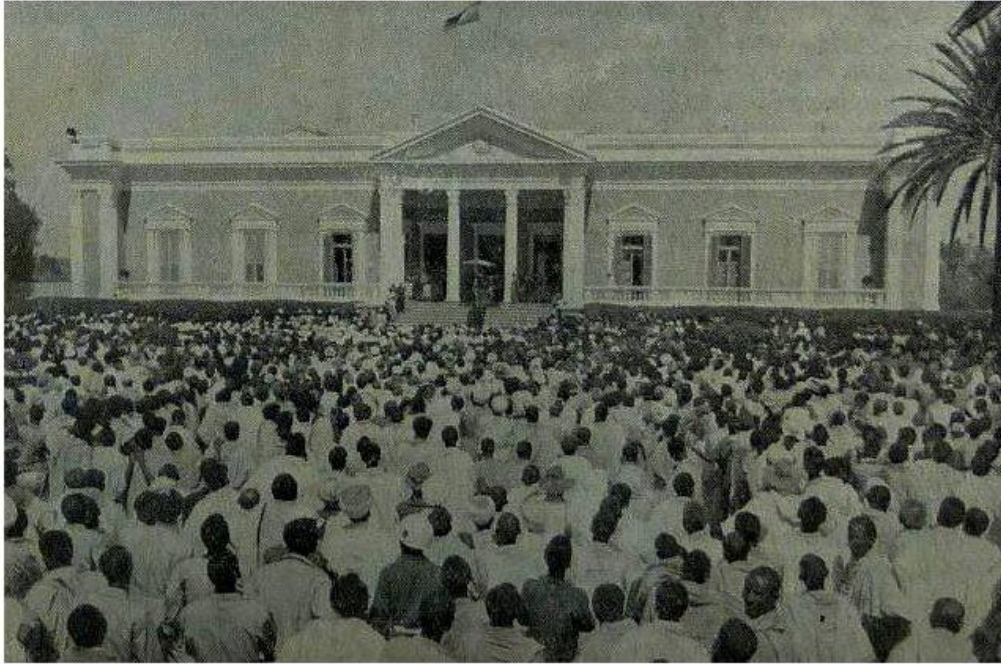
The Emperor, escorted by the Chief Executive, addressing Eritreans, June 1962



Source: Etiopia, July 1, 1962

⁴² *Zemen*, "H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie I speech of advice to the Eritrean people and resolutions for the development of the country" (Translation), June 28, 1962.

Eritrean Audience to the Emperor's Address. Asmara Palace, June 1962



Source: Zemen, June 28, 1962

When the Emperor left for Addis Ababa, the end of Eritrea's autonomous status and the formal integration of the territory into the Ethiopian empire was a foregone conclusion. The Emperor's extended trip was intended to prepare Eritreans for the final act. Regardless of the money the emperor dispersed or several of the favors and titles he awarded, public opinion was contrary to his plan. The majority of Eritreans were neither willing nor ready to join the empire. Consul Looram suggested neither a vote from the Assembly nor a plebiscite from the people would bring the union Ethiopia wanted. He noted:

On subsequent canvassing key Eritrean figures, however, one sees the other side of the coin, which has certainly been covered and mute during this period. Despite all the gimmicks used by the Emperor the task of the Emperor's Representative and that of the Chief Executive will not be an easy one. ... The fact remains that a favorable vote by the Assembly, the procedure normally constructed as the one to be used, cannot be taken for granted. A plebiscite, if remotely honest, would not bring about the desired result.⁴³

The American Consul, who claimed that over the past years he had observed the strength of Eritrean opposition and the increasing tendency towards independence, mentioned the latest student strikes and the signs of "unusual obduracy" from the Assembly as indication why

⁴³ Looram to State Department, Airgram A-1, June 3, 1962. Quoted in Tekie, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Eritreans would not keenly become part of Ethiopia. The Eritrean Assembly which convened on June 19, 1962, three days after the Emperor's arrival to Eritrea, rejected the Chief Executive's proposal to allocate large sums for the police reinforcement. Such an act from the Assembly was strange, especially while the Emperor and his royal entourage were in Asmara. Looram noted: "first, the acquiescence of the Eritrean Assembly cannot be taken for granted even though its members have been suborned with money, titles and decorations, and second, should unilateral action be attempted, it is possible that it may cause a violent 'reaction'."⁴⁴ In another report Looram wrote: "It is always possible that under the circumstances the Emperor may decide to declare union unilaterally. In such a case potentially serious internal difficulties could be expected. The Muslims could be counted upon to react, and even many of the Christian highlands might take to the bush. Further and more serious, student demonstration would probably insure, possibly support in this instance by the workers."⁴⁵

Some Italian and Eritrean jurists were firmly convinced that the Emperor's June visit was to convince opposition members of the Assembly to vote in favor of full annexation. Considering this possibility, Eritrean and Italian judges and some members of the Eritrean Assembly secretly convened to discuss what should be the position of these magistrates if the Eritrean Assembly would vote for union. Having discussed the issue secretly they decided that the Supreme Court would reject the Assembly's decision and would call for a plebiscite. They also agreed that following the Court's decision Assembly members opposing union would seek intervention from the UN.⁴⁶ The general understanding at the time was that the federation would be declared end anytime soon with a vote from the Assembly. The meeting of these magistrates was held to clarify the position of the Eritrean Supreme Court in case of such a move from the Assembly.

As a continuation of the Emperor's June visit and goodwill tour, on July 12, 1962, the Emperor's Representative with several Federal and Eritrean Officials paid a visit to the Western Province, where anti-Ethiopian sentiment was high due to unemployment and a lower standard of living

⁴⁴ "Monthly Summary of Events - June 1962" from Matthew Looram, American Consul, Asmara, to the Department of State, Washington DC, USA, No. 775a.00/7462, July 4, 1962. Quoted in Ruth, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴⁵ Looram to State Department, Airgram A-1, June 3, 1962. Quoted in Tekie, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁴⁶ RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 186, "Eritrea: Secret Meeting," August 1, 1962. According to the report the meeting was held on June 26, 1962 at the Italian Law School in Asmara. Those who convened the meeting were Gaetano Latilla - Judge in the Supreme Court, Johannes Berhane - Judge in the Supreme Court, Berhe Berhane - Judge in the District Court, Ezio Rusmini - President of the Association of barristers, Mesghenna Ghebresghi and Tewelde Tedla - both members of the Eritrean Assembly opposing union.

among the predominantly Muslim population of the lowlands. While *Dejazmatch* Hamid Ferej, President of the Eritrean Assembly, was giving a speech in Aqordat two hand grenades were thrown at the entourage. The attack killed eight and wounded ninety-two people. Among the dead were *Fitawrari* Omar Hasseno, Secretary of Law and Justice of the Eritrean government, *Bashai* Ibrahim Mahmud (Member of the Federal Parliament) and six local notables. Those lightly wounded were the Emperor's Representative, General Abiy Abebe, his assistant *Blatta* Kumllachew Bellete, the Eritrean Chief Executive *Bitweded* Asfaha Weldemikael, president and vice president of the Eritrean Assembly *Dejazmatch* Hamid Ferej and *Abba* Dimetros respectively.⁴⁷ The attack was organized by members of the ELF.⁴⁸ To minimize the psychological impact of the violence federal authorities ordered the continuation of the tour. Hence it was continued to Barentu, Tessenei, and Sebderat as scheduled and later returned to Keren.⁴⁹

The Aqordat bombing was a catalyst for annexation. It convinced the Ethiopian government that the absorption of Eritrea to the empire should be sooner rather than later. This would enable it to deal by itself with the growing violence in Eritrea, mainly the hit and run activities of the ELF, which the Eritrean police failed to control. According to the vice president of the Assembly *Abba* Dimetros, following the incident the Emperor ordered the steady termination of the federation.⁵⁰ With the Assembly being in the summer break, it took four more months for the Emperor and his loyal subjects to bring down the federation.

⁴⁷ RDC/ETH/INT/36/01/Ethiopian Intelligence Report, 20/07/1962). Thirty-five of the wounded had heavy injuries and were admitted to hospital, the rest were given initial aid and recommended for follow-ups. In addition to the senior leadership of the Federal and Eritrean authorities, the list of the wounded include *Teweldeberhan* Ghebremdhin (Eritrean director of public relations), two senior divisional officers from Aqordat and Keren, and *Alemayehu* Kidane (chief of federal press).

⁴⁸ Günter Schröder, interview with Ahmed Badurai, Kassala March 22, 1989.

⁴⁹ *Zemen*, July 17, 1962. Caught a few days after the bombing incident, Abdurrahman Mohammed Musa (27 years old) and Mohammed El-Hassan Hasseno (34 years old) were charged for throwing the two bombs. A year later, on July 30, 1963, while Abdurrahman was condemned to death Mohammed El-Hassan was sentenced to twenty years in prison by the Higher Court. Mohammed El-Hassan Hassano's penalty of twenty years of imprisonment was due to the fact that the grenade he threw did not explode in the attack. He was a nephew of *Fitawrari* Omar Hasseno, Secretary of Law and Justice of the Eritrean government, who died in the attack. See *Hbret*, August 3, 1963.

⁵⁰ In an interview *Abba* Dimetros informed Bocresion Haile that the order was transmitted to the Emperor's Representative, General Abiy Abebe, the Chief Executive, Asfaha Weldemikael and Dimetros himself. See Bocresion Haile, *The Collusion on Eritrea*. (unpublished book, 2000), p. 231.

6.4 The Final Days of the Assembly and the Controversial Issue of the Vote

After a decade-long gradual undermining of Eritrean autonomy, in autumn 1962, Ethiopia was ready to move and realize its ambition of annexing Eritrea. The federal authorities were convinced that the 'legitimate' way to end the federation and incorporate Eritrea to the empire was through a vote from the Eritrean Assembly. Hence, strategies were drafted to convince the Assembly to comply with a demand for union. Under the Emperor representative's guidance, loyal subjects in the Eritrean leadership were given the task of facilitating this. This has to be done through bribery and intimidation. The Chief Executive, the vice president of the Assembly and the Eritrean Police Commissioner were the key personalities to implement the final annexation plan.

One way of letting Eritreans know that the federation was to be ended and that Ethiopia was not a power to resist was to show them the might of Ethiopia. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, an Ethiopian military officer of the time, noted: "the army [Ethiopian] had already moved to Eritrea before the end of the federation was announced. The speeches of the army commander and the governor never referred to the special federal arrangement. We saw ourselves as a liberation army. In 1961, just before the federation was dissolved, we held a big airborne show in Aqordat. It was nothing more than a show of force to let the Eritreans know how powerful Ethiopia had grown."⁵¹

Managing a vote from the Eritrean Assembly was crucial for Ethiopia to avoid any critiques which would arise in the aftermath of the announcement of the termination of the federation. A vote was calculated as a sufficient legal ground to end the arrangement. But Ethiopia was not sure of Assembly members' compliance to the demand. They might prove recalcitrant or even refuse to vote. Bribery and intimidation, therefore, were considered ways of securing the vote. One by one Assembly members were called and asked to put their signature of consent to the abolition of the federation. All members except seventeen, including the president of the Assembly, who was still hospitalized due to the Aqordat bombing and refused to cooperate, signed a letter indicating they would vote for union. According to Bocresion 51 of the 68 members had thus signed. This was negotiated in return for receiving a lifetime salary for each

⁵¹ Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*. (Trenton N.J: The Red Sea Press, 1989), p. 80.

member. The chief negotiator was the vice president of the Eritrean Assembly, *Abba Dimetros Ghebremariam*. Members were individually summoned by the vice president. Local administrators of the Administrative divisions were informed to send members residing in their respective locality to the vice president. *Blatta Mohammed Omar Suleiman* was informed by the administrator of the Senafe district that the vice president would like to see him in Asmara.⁵² The decision to end the federal arrangement was thus made in advance. A vote from the Assembly was only needed to tell Eritreans and the rest of the world that the decision came from the Assembly itself. Securing members' signatures was also a strategy to soften them up and eventually avoid a debate in the Assembly when the final verdict was pronounced.

Although the Assembly was mostly packed with unionists and fifty-one of its members were already made to sign a document of consent to terminate the federation, ironically members were not willing to vote to abolish the federation. In the beginning of November 1962 Assembly members were ordered not to leave Asmara. They were simply told there was work involving them so that they should stay. The better informed predicting what was coming had tried to run away. Leaving the town, however, was impossible as runaway members were compelled to return back to Asmara at the town's exit checkpoints. One former member, Saleh Ahmed Idris recalls: "the police were calling us to have our signatures. As I owned a car, myself, Omar Saleh and Ahmed Barole tried to drive away to Massawa but we were forced to return back from *Deposito*. We also tried on the way to Keren, again they compelled us to return. Finally, we managed to reach Senafe. Before reaching my home, however, I was captured by the police and sent back to Asmara."⁵³ In order to skip voting a few members, feigning illness, had admitted

⁵² RDC/Acc. No. 05005, Ref. L0041, Interview with *Blatta Mohammed Omar Suleiman* by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Senafe (Eritrea), May 20, 1991. *Blatta Mohammed Omar* claimed the signing episode was done at the personal residence of the vice president. Another member of the Assembly, Saleh Ahmed Idris, said it was in the office of the vice president. (RDC/Acc. No. 05008, Ref. L0044, Interview with Interview Saleh Ahmed Idris by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Senafe (Eritrea), May 21, 1991. Although many agreed that the man behind facilitating the signature of consent was the vice president of the Assembly, when prompted by Bocresion Haile about this, the response of *Abba Dimetros Ghebremariam* was: "I do not remember [who negotiated the matter.]" According to *Dejazmatch Fessehazion Haile*, who was Secretary of Economic Affairs of the Eritrean Government, the key negotiators were *Abba Dimetros* and *Dejazmatch Araya Wassie*, Secretary of the Interior of the Eritrean government. See Bocresion, *op. cit.*, p. 230. Bocresion claimed he has a copy of the document signed by the fifty-one members and listed the signatories. See Bocresion, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.

⁵³ Interview Saleh Ahmed Idris, *op. cit.*

themselves to hospital.⁵⁴ This was in the hope that a vote would not materialize for a lack of a quorum.⁵⁵

In grounding the final move, during the early weeks of the November 1962, influential Eritrean Officials were repeatedly summoned by the Emperor. On November 5, the Chief Executive went to Addis Ababa and returned two days later. On November 7 the Ethiopian Prime Minister Aklilu Habteweld came to Asmara where he stayed three days to monitor the atmosphere in Eritrea. Again on November 11, the Chief Executive, the Eritrean Police Commissioner and the vice president of the Eritrean Assembly were called to Addis Ababa for the final order. They spent three days there and upon their return members of the Eritrean police were relieved from their duty and ordered to remain indoors until further notice. The Ethiopian army which stationed in Eritrea took charge. The troops were ordered to take positions in Asmara and other Eritrean towns.⁵⁶

The Issue of the Vote

The Eritrean Assembly's final role in the dissolution of the federation is controversial. Much of the existing literature on the Eritrean/Ethiopian studies showed that the federation was terminated following a "unanimous vote" by the Assembly to end it. This is the dominant story that one finds in the academic and public discourses on the issue. This is misleading information. Based on archival and oral sources, this study affirms that there was no actual vote from the Eritrean Assembly to end the federation.

In early November 1962 the vice president of the Assembly, *Abba* Dimetros, made four unsuccessful attempts to procedurally dissolve the federation. The attempts could not be considered for the lack of quorum. Members opposing to vote for union simply avoided attending the Assembly. Colonel Tedla Uqbit, the Police Commissioner, was the busiest man that week in Asmara to make sure all members including those recalcitrant were available for the

⁵⁴ Ibid. Assembly member *Blatta* Hamd Omar escaped to Addi Keyih pretending he was seriously ill and another member Faytingha was dragged from the hospital.

⁵⁵ According to Article 11 of Standing Orders of the Eritrean Assembly the quorum of the Assembly shall consist fifty of the sixty-eight members. RDC/Box 20/Acc. No. 14320/Representative Assembly of Eritrea: Standing Orders, 1952.

⁵⁶ RDC/ETH/BIO/43.04/Weldeab Weldemariam/Ref. No. 77/*The Truth about Eritrea*.

intended final vote. Members were, therefore, hauled from hospital beds and their homes and prevented from leaving the town.⁵⁷

Brigadier-General Tedla Uqbit: Head of the Eritrean Police (1955-1963)



Source: Zewde Retta, The Affair of Eritrea.

On November 14, 1962 Assembly members were summoned in a mood of uneasy and ominous anticipation. Many of the members naively assumed that they were being called to debate the budget. The vice president of the Assembly, who took the chair in the absence of the president, announced that the Chief Executive would come to the Assembly to submit an important motion. Ten minutes later the Chief Executive, *Bitweded* Asfaha Weldemikael, entered the Assembly hall with his six Secretaries, the Eritrean Police Commissioner and other notables. After making a brief speech which stated that "Eritrea was united to its motherland in 1952" and that "the federation was an imposed foreign instrument undermining the unity of the two countries,"⁵⁸

⁵⁷ RDC/Acc. No. 05000, Ref. L0036, Interview with *Grazmatch* Ahmed Saleh Barole by the Research and Information Center on Eritrea, Addi Keyih (Eritrea), April 29, 1991. *Grazmatch* Ahmed Saleh Barole was a member of the second and third legislative of the Eritrean Assembly. Ethiopian Intelligence report mentioned one of these motions to end the federation was put forwarded on the eve of the annexation day. RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 232, "Eritrea/Western Province - Miscellaneous," November 24, 1962.

⁵⁸ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14012/Eritrean Assembly Third Legislature Minute No. 67, November 14, 1962, Appendix A, "Speech by His Excellency the Chief Executive."

Asfaha informed the sixty Assembly members present the following statement in a form of a motion:

Aware of the name 'federation' finds no place in our history and tradition; understanding the fact that it was a tool of our enemies and a detriment to our people; realizing that the continuation to operate two systems and administrations serves no purpose but wastes human and material power; realizing the damage of adhering an alien imposed administration for the one people of Ethiopia; having been conveyers of the desire of our people; we have annulled the federation with its all its implications, henceforth completely united with our motherland Ethiopia.⁵⁹

After Asfaha Weldemikael made the speech there was perfunctory applause in the Assembly. No vote was taken on the issue. It was claimed the motion was endorsed with applause.⁶⁰ But according to *Grazmatch* Shewit Desta who was inside the Assembly hall that day, members were caught by surprise and the applause heard in the Assembly hall was more that of the other attendants brought by the government to attend the session.⁶¹ Puzzled by the announcement and at the same time frightened by the events surrounding them, none of the Assembly members dared to protest except one, Osman Hindi, who was immediately silenced.⁶² Members of the Assembly were completely confounded by the absurdity of the decision and walked out without uttering a single word.

The Assembly was not given an opportunity to discuss the issue. Its members were told that Eritrea had become part of Ethiopia and that this was the final resolution of the Eritrean case. The Assembly didn't have a say on the matter. The whole process took less than an hour.⁶³ The Chief Executive's statement was followed by a brief speech from the vice president and the Assembly was swiftly declared adjourned.

⁵⁹ Ibid. See also *Etiopia*, November 18, 1962.

⁶⁰ In the speech he made after the Chief Executive's statement, *Abba* Dimetros, the Vice President of the Assembly, praised members for endorsing the motion with an applause. RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14012/Eritrean Assembly Third Legislature Minute No. 67, November 14, 1962, Appendix B, "Speech by the Vice-President of the Assembly." See also *Etiopia*, November 18, 1962.

⁶¹ Interview with *Grazmatch* Shewit Desta, by Alemseged Tesfai, Asmara, October 4, 2012. The informant was personal driver of *Abba* Dimetros, the vice president of the Assembly.

⁶² Interview with Ibrahim Mohammed by Alemseged Tesfai, Asmara, September 24, 2003. The informant was an employee of the Archive Center of the Eritrean Government.

⁶³ At 10:35 AM the Vice President took the chair, ten minutes later, at 10:45 AM the Chief Executive with his six Secretaries of the executive department entered the Assembly room. After the Chief Executive addressed the Assembly his speech which announced the termination of the federation, the Assembly adjourned at 11: 15 AM. RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14012/Eritrean Assembly Third Legislature Minute No. 67, November 14, 1962. The federal status of Eritrea was terminated and the country was reduced into a part of the Ethiopian Empire with forty minutes of drama in the Assembly hall. See the last minute of the Assembly in the Appendices.

Assembly members did not exactly know how Eritrea's autonomous status would be ended and they did not have an advance warning that the federation would be terminated on that fateful day, November 14. They were simply told that there was a special session for that day. The vice president, *Abba Dimetros* echoed: "we told them that there was a special case to be considered for that day. We made sure that everyone had attended, if necessary by force of the police."⁶⁴

While the final verdict to end Eritrea's autonomy was pronounced the general atmosphere was tense and intimidating, not only for the members of the Assembly but also to the people. Those days were hardest and terrifying for Eritreans. A massive show of force was needed, as the federal authorities were not certain that the Eritrean Assembly would willingly vote to annul the federation. The presence of the Ethiopian army, thus, was to deal with any non-compliance either from the Assembly or the people. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, one of the commanders of the Ethiopian army, summed it up:

One week before the vote my battalion, the 34th, was ordered to march through the city and to camp outside until four days after the vote. I co-commanded one of the companies that ringed Asmara during that time. It was clear from our orders that we were there in case of any trouble from the Assembly or the people. In addition to our battalion, the entire police force, the air force and a detachment of infantry from another part of Ethiopia were all on hand, making their presence felt by marching through the streets and generally being as visible as possible.⁶⁵

Remembering those days, former member of the Eritrean Assembly, Saleh Ahmed Idris, said: "the soldiers were all over Asmara chanting '*Embi yale sew tiyit agursew*' [Make the one who refuses swallow a bullet]. Nobody was courageous to speak. The police commissioner was there and the situation was new to us. No one opted to openly oppose as we knew that we cannot stop these people from doing so [termination the Federation]."⁶⁶ The terror from the Ethiopian army, which considered itself as a liberation army, also had a lasting effect on the people. The army's intimidation remained with young Eritreans, eventually leading them to take up arms against the empire. Recalling her childhood days, the current Minister of Tourism of Eritrea echoed: "I was in the primary school when the federation was abolished. Then we used to see the soldiers in big

⁶⁴ Bocresion, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁶⁵ Dawit, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁶⁶ Interview with Saleh Ahmed Idris, *op. cit.*

trucks shouting their slogan of *Embi yale sew tiyit agursew*. They and their trucks used to scare us a lot; and we associated Ethiopia with them."⁶⁷

To celebrate the termination of the federation, the same night the dazed Assembly members were invited to the Asmara palace where a cocktail reception was arranged. Members' stunned reaction was noticeable throughout the reception program. The celebration was more of the federal authorities and those Eritrean officials persistently worked to realize that day.⁶⁸ That was the last time members of the Assembly would ever congregate together in one place.

The Emperor lost no time to nail down the end of the federation. Within hours of the events in the Eritrean Assembly, the Ethiopian radio announced the end of the federation.⁶⁹ On the same day, both the Ethiopian Senate and Chamber of Deputies were hastily convened to approve the Eritrean Assembly's 'decision'.⁷⁰ The next day, November 15, 1962, the federal status of Eritrea was officially terminated with an Imperial decree *Order No. 27 of 1962*. The decree announced that "the Eritrean Assembly has expressed the will of the people of Eritrea that the federal system of administration be terminated and that Eritrea be wholly integrated into the unitary system of administration of the Empire of Ethiopia."⁷¹ According to the proclamation the Emperor declared the termination of the federation following the "resolution of the Eritrean Assembly" and "taking into account the resolution unanimously adopted by the parliament of the empire of Ethiopia." The decree asserting the incorporation of Eritrea to the Empire further stated that "the federal status of Eritrea with Ethiopia is hereby terminated and Eritrea, which continue to constitute an integral part of the empire of Ethiopia, is hereby wholly integrated into the unitary system of administration of Our Empire."⁷² The decade-long federation was declared terminated unilaterally, and Eritrea was reduced to the fourteenth province of the Ethiopian Empire. This marked the end of the unhappy and defunct Eritrean-Ethiopian federation.

⁶⁷ Minister Askalu Menkorios told this to Alemseged Abbay when he interviewed her in 1994. See Alemseged Abbay, *Identity Jilted or Re-Imagining Identity? The Divergent Paths of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalist Struggles*. (Lawrenceville, NJ, The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1998), p. 81.

⁶⁸ Bocresion Haile, *The Collusion on Eritrea*. 2nd edition (unpublished book, 2007), p. 200. The Assembly members' reaction was told to Bocresion by his brother, *Dejazmatch Fessehazion Haile*, Secretary of the Economic Affairs of the Eritrean government, who participated in the cocktail reception.

⁶⁹ *The Truth about Eritrea, op. cit.*

⁷⁰ *Zemen*, November 15, 1962.

⁷¹ *Reunion of Eritrea*, Proclamation Order No. 27 of 1962.

⁷² *Ibid.*

According to the Emperor the federation was an alien concept imposed on the people of Eritrea, and during the last ten years had tended to "slow the speed of the economic and social progress of the entire nation including Eritrea."⁷³ Hence, it was argued that Ethiopia only accepted the Eritrean wishes:

The people of Eritrea, through their representatives gathered together in the Eritrean Assembly, recognizing the harmful consequences of the operation of the federal system through the experiences of the past decade, desirous of living together with their other Ethiopian brothers without hindrance or obstacle, I (sic) have formally requested, by their resolution voluntarily and unanimously adopted on November 14, 1962 that the federation be dissolved. In its place, they have asked for the complete administrative integration of Eritrea with the rest of Ethiopia in order to facilitate and speed the economic growth and development of the nation. We have accepted this resolution and have consented to its being placed into effect.⁷⁴

The revised Ethiopian constitution of 1955 was immediately applied to Eritrea, placing the Eritrean people under an absolute monarchy. All Eritrean laws, enactments, and regulations were pronounced to remain in effect until replaced or repealed.⁷⁵

American Consul Richard Johnson, witnessing the events that led to the abolition of the federation, termed Ethiopia's role "a brutal and arbitrary act."⁷⁶ Labeling Ethiopia's action a "putsch", he informed the State Department that there was nothing in the 'vote' that could consider as voluntary, let alone unanimous. In mockery of the Ethiopian claim, he noted: "The 'unification' was prepared from above in maximum secrecy without the slightest public debate or discussion. The 'vote by acclamation' was a shoddy comedy, barely disguising the absence of support even on the part of the government-picked Eritrean Assembly."⁷⁷

As claimed by many Ethiopianist writers, the Eritrean Assembly never voted to end the federation and terminate Eritrea's autonomous status. It did not have a say on the matter at all. The Assembly merely gathered under coercion and heard a statement from the Chief Executive that announced the end of the federal arrangement and the incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia. It is, however, peculiar even after several decades that some literature still asserts that the

⁷³ *Ethiopia Observer*, Vol. VI, 1963, *The Emperor's Speech on the Reunion of Eritrea*, November 15, 1962.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Reunion of Eritrea*, Proclamation Order No. 27 of 1962.

⁷⁶ Johnson to State Department, "US Position Towards Ethiopian 'Unification' Takeover of Eritrea - Telegram 775.00/11-1662, November 16, 1962. Quoted in Tekie, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁷⁷ Johnson to State Department, Airgram A-27, November 16, 1962. Quoted in Tekie, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

Eritrean Assembly 'unanimously voted' to end the Federation. This was a rhetoric that the Ethiopian state was repeating throughout the years of the Eritrean struggle for independence.⁷⁸

Did the Eritrean Assembly had a Mandate to Abolish the Federation?

As seen above, the argument which is repeated to this day by some scholars that the Eritrean Assembly had "unanimously voted" to abolish the Federation was erroneous. Ethiopian and Western scholars routinely refer to the Assembly's 'vote' in favor of the dissolution of the federation. Archival sources plainly illustrate no vote was taken on the issue. They rather show that a 'motion' from the Chief Executive was "adopted unanimously by acclamation."⁷⁹ Actually a statement that terminated the federation was merely read to Assembly members and the whole process was concluded in a state of intimidation and confusion.

Even if one assumes that the Ethiopian government had nothing to do with the annulment of the autonomous status of Eritrea and a vote was secured from the Assembly, the legality of a decision from the Eritrean Assembly to end the federal status of Eritrea would be questionable. Neither the Eritrean Assembly nor the Federal government had the constitutional right to alter the substance of or to terminate either the federating act or Eritrea's constitution. Article 91 of the Eritrean Constitution prohibits the Assembly from passing legislation that violates the Federal Act.⁸⁰ Moreover, the Assembly had no mandate from its electorate to alter the federal status of Eritrea. Besides, no public discussion took place on the question of changing the international status of Eritrea. If such a fundamental change was to be made, the wishes of the Eritrean people should at the very least have been ascertained by a plebiscite.

While drafting the Eritrean Constitution and setting up the Eritrean autonomous government within the Federation, the UN Commissioner and his panel of legal consultants also affirmed that

⁷⁸ Many Ethiopian writers still refer that the Eritrean Assembly unanimously voted to abolish the Federation. Surprisingly, Tekeste Negash, who has carried out extensive research on the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation, also noted that there was a unanimous vote from the Assembly. See Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia the Federal Experience* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1997), p. 138. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, an Ethiopian Army commander who witnessed events, also penned of the "unanimous vote" from the Assembly. See Dawit *op. cit.*, p. 81. Zewde Retta is also among those claiming the 'unanimous vote' from the Assembly. See Zewde Retta, *op. cit.*, p. 530.

⁷⁹ RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14012/Eritrean Assembly Third Legislature Minute No. 67, November 14, 1962.

⁸⁰ Article 91 of the Eritrean Constitution expressly provided that: (1) The Assembly may not, by means of an amendment, introduce into the Constitution any provision which would not be in conformity with the Federal Act. (2) Article 16 of the Constitution, by the terms of which the Constitution of Eritrea is based on the principles of democratic government, shall not be amended.

"if it were necessary either to amend or to interpret the Federal Act, only the General Assembly, as the author of that instrument, would be competent to take a decision. Similarly, if the Federal Act was violated, the General Assembly could be seized of the matter."⁸¹ However, neither the UN nor the Western powers who crafted the federal arrangement were interested to object to the Emperor's adventure.

The Emperor's astute policy of protecting the economic interests of the Western countries in both Eritrea and Ethiopia, especially those of Italy, the US, the UK and Israel, was instrumental in hindering any reaction on their part against his Eritrean policy. By concluding agreements with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and other socialist countries he also promoted friendship with the socialist camp. He constantly used to visit key Western, Socialist and Third world countries and invited their heads of state to visit Ethiopia. This personal diplomacy gave him the assurance that the Eritrean issue would not be raised in the UN and as it was proven none of these countries were concerned enough to bring the Eritrean issue before the UN.⁸²

6.5 Eritrea Annexed: The Aftermath

The termination of Eritrea's federal status was extremely unpopular among Eritreans. Many were disappointed and some even tried to protest in those tense days. The next day after the federation was declared dead, the ELM organized and staged a demonstration in Asmara. It was dispersed by force, and many were imprisoned.⁸³ Describing how Eritreans felt about integration with Ethiopia, Consul Johnson's cable of November 16, 1962 reads:

⁸¹ RDC/Box 32/Acc. No. 00681/*Final Report of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea*, General Assembly Official Records: Seventh Session, Supplement No. 15 (A/2188), New York, 1952, p. 20.

⁸² For the diplomatic engagement of the Emperor see Eyasu Gayim, *The Eritrean Question: The Conflict between the Right of Self-Determination and the Interests of States*. (Uppsala: Iustus Forlag AB, 1993), pp. 427-432. The US backed the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia and to that effect helped the federal resolution pass through the UN. From then onwards, the US endorsed the territorial integrity of Ethiopia and refused to countenance any demand for Eritrean separation. In May 1953, six months after the beginning of the federation, the US and Emperor Haile Selassie signed a military assistance agreement and twenty-five years defense installations treaty. The agreement became the cornerstone of American-Ethiopian military relations between the early 1950s and the late 1970s and assured the US complete freedom of access to facilities on Ethiopian soil by surface, land and sea, as well as freedom of flight throughout the country. The, *Kagnew* Communications Center in Asmara became a crucial part of America's world-wide network of linkages mainly used to monitor Soviet activities during the cold war. For details on the Ethiopian-US relations see Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, "The United States, Ethiopia and the 1963 Somali-Soviet Arms Deal: Containment and the Balance of Power Dilemma in the Horn of Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36, 4, (Dec., 1998) and Bereket Habte Selassie, "The American Dilemma on the Horn," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 22, 2, (1984).

⁸³ N.A., *Medrekh Federeshn'n Gobeta Ertra B'Etyopian 1950-1962*. (Orota: NP, N.D.) p. 78.

While it is difficult to measure 'public opinion' in an ethnically complex, largely illiterate society such as Eritrea, our subjective conclusion is that most of the politically conscious Eritrean population is dismayed by the development. From newly arrived Peace Corps teachers, from missionaries and others with daily contact with the Eritrean population, we confirm our own impression of a strong feeling of Eritrean separateness from Ethiopians and a preference for at least an autonomy."⁸⁴

According to the American consul's cable, Eritreans refused to participate in the staged celebrations. The cable reads: "while there have been several feeble shows of poorly contrived enthusiasm in the Palace area, overall quietness of the city reflects a general attitude of shock and dismay. Quietness broken occasionally by Ethiopian air force jets making low flying passes over the city. Police patrolling streets in force. Small pro-unionist groups seem to contain fair proportion of Coptic priests."⁸⁵ In the lowlands many staged demonstrations. On December 5, 1962 protestors in Massawa were dispersed by the Ethiopian army led, by Major Merid. On December 11, 1962 strikes were held in Keren and Aqordat. All were contained through military force.⁸⁶

Two months after the federation was terminated, in January 1963, the Emperor visited Eritrea. This was a time to reward people that had fulfilled his dream of total integration of Eritrea into his empire. On January 13, General Abiy Abebe, the Emperor's Representative, was appointed Governor General of the province of Eritrea, the Chief Executive of the Eritrean government, *Bitweded* Asfaha Weldemikael, was appointed Minister of Justice of Ethiopia, and the vice president of the Eritrean Assembly, *Melake Selam* Dimetros Ghebremariam, was named vice president of the Ethiopian Senate. Several of the officials of the federal and former Eritrean government were bestowed various entitlements.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Johnson to State Department , Airgram A-27, November 16, 1962. Quoted in Tekie, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ RDC/ETH/INT/07/01/ Field Intelligence Reports 1962.

⁸⁷ *Hbret*, January 22, 1963. *Fitawrari* Tesfayohannes Berhe with a rank of deputy minister appointed deputy governor general of the province of Eritrea, *Fitawrari* Ali Radia and *Fitawrari* Ibrahim Shum Humed Arey with a rank of deputy minister named advisors to the governor general of Eritrea, *Fitawrari* Fessehazion Haile and *Fitawrari* Gebreyohannes Tesfamariam bestowed a rank of deputy minister, *Fitawrari* Asegehegn Araya with a title of deputy minister appointed member of the Ethiopian Senate, Blatta Kumllachew Bellete with a title of assistance minister named member of the Ethiopian Senate, *Fitawrari* Haregot Abbay appointed mayor of Asmara. On February 19, 1963 Asfaha Weldemikael, *Abba* Dimetros and Kumllachew left to Addis Ababa to commence their new jobs. *Hbret* February 21, 1963.

After initially named vice president of the Ethiopian Senate, *Abba Dimetros* was later appointed head of the Orthodox Church in Aksum, with the ecclesiastic title of *Nebure'ed*. His relation with the Emperor after the federation, however, was not to the predilection of the former vice president of the Eritrean Assembly. After the federation the Emperor kept him away. While interviewed about his relation with the Emperor after the end of the federation, *Abba Dimetros* replied: "he was never the same towards me as before its abolition."⁸⁸ In the decades that followed the federation, *Abba Dimetros* came to regret his destructive role in the termination of the federal status of Eritrea. When his expectations turned into illusion and having witnessed Eritrean suffering after the federation years, he echoed: "I never believed that an Emperor would lie."⁸⁹

After the federation was terminated many of the Unionists were dismayed with the treatment and position they received from the Ethiopian government. Ethiopia's policy of appointing Amharas and other non-Eritreans as governor created great resentment. This was interpreted by many as "typical Amhara chauvinism."⁹⁰ The case of the Police Commissioner Brigadier-General Tedla Uqbit, an ardent Unionist and a man who played a considerable role in the incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia, was exemplary. Surprisingly, nine months after the fall of the federation he lost his life in a confrontation with the regime he loyally served for years. The General began to resent Ethiopian rule when his power was considerably minimized by the Governor-General, Abiy Abebe. He began to object to orders. Refuting a call for his transfer to the Ethiopian capital he even planned to stage a coup through arresting key Ethiopian officials in Eritrea, including Abiy Abebe. Summoning all of his seventy-two police prison officers in Asmara, he informed them that the Federation was terminated without the will of the people and union with Ethiopia was imposed by force. Hence, he declared that he had restored the federation back and ordered his subordinates, all police heads of each division in the territory, to stay in standby position until further order. Admitting his previous repression of the people Tedla Uqbit called the police officers to no longer harass the people for political purposes. The Governor-General, Abiy Abebe, ordered the arrest of Tedla and on June 11, 1963 his police headquarter was encircled by

⁸⁸ Bocresion, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 231. After his entitlement of *Nebure'ed* of Aksum *Abba Dimetros* was later named General Manager of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church before he was transferred to the vice presidency of the Ethiopian Senate, a disguised retirement for him. Bocresion, 2nd ed. *op. cit.*, pp. 201-202.

⁹⁰ Dawit, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

the Ethiopian army. Amid negotiations with Ethiopian army officers, it was pronounced that General Tedla Uqbit had committed suicide.⁹¹ Although official reports claimed the same, the death of the former police commissioner is still mysterious.

The government organ *Hbret* announced the death of the influential Unionist with just three lines: "yesterday Brigadier-General Tedla Uqbit, Police Commissioner of Eritrea, committed suicide for unknown reason."⁹² The same day Colonel Zer'emariam Azzazi, his deputy, was promoted to Police Commissioner of Eritrea.⁹³

The dissolution of the federation and the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia opened a new phase in the development of Eritrean nationalism. Heavily disgruntled by Ethiopia's gradual takeover of their autonomy, Eritreans were considering the ultimate military option to challenge Ethiopia. The formation of ELF and its declaration of an armed resistance, a year ahead of the formal abrogation of the federation, was a vivid expression of this. Commenced by the more resentful lowlanders, armed resistance against Ethiopia gradually grew in the coming years, to become a nationwide opposition against Ethiopian hegemony in Eritrea. Eritreans, however, had to battle the Ethiopian state for three decades to claim their independence. The protracted war of independence finally gave birth to the Eritrean nation in 1991, creating a new state in the volatile Horn of Africa.

⁹¹ RDC/ETH/BIO/44.13/ Brigadier-General Tedla Uqbit, "Examination Archive on the death of Brigadier General Tedla Uqbit, June 20, 1963. A report of Ethiopian Intelligence mentioned that in his futile attempt of restoring the federation, Tedla Uqbit had contacted the UN Secretary General, Mr. U-Thant through the consulate of the United Kingdom in Asmara. RDC/ETH/INT/47/01/Field Intelligence Report No. 67, "Eritrea: General Tedla Oqbit", January 1, 1964.

⁹² *Hbret*, June 12, 1963.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The third Eritrean Assembly, like its predecessor, came into being unconstitutionally and with clear interventions of the authorities in the election process. The 1960 election, thus, resulted in the return of the majority of members of the Second Eritrean Assembly into the third. The very few "disloyal" members from the previous Assembly and some new "non-amenable" candidates were systematically sidelined. To the liking of Ethiopia, an Assembly which would easily comply to its plan of incorporating Eritrea into the Ethiopian Empire was returned to office. With the principal pillars of Eritrean autonomy dismantled by its predecessor, the task expected of the third Eritrean Assembly was to pull the final trigger and end Eritrea's autonomous status by voting for the termination of the federation.

Unlike its two predecessors, the Third Eritrean Assembly had a brief spell in office. During its two-year life, the Assembly was operating under pressure from the Eritrean public and the Ethiopian government, both having their respective, diametrically opposite demands to the Assembly. While the Crown, through bribery and intimidation, was heavily engaged initially to convince the Assembly and later coerce it for a vote of early union, the Eritrean public was pushing for the accountability of the Assembly to honor Eritrean autonomy and refrain itself from being a collaborator to Ethiopia's annexation plans.

To the dismay and surprise of Ethiopia and its supporters in the Eritrean government, the Eritrean Assembly was reluctant to cooperate, at least in the end. Although enticed through several entitlements and promises of lifelong salary for its members, the Eritrean Assembly, which was believed to be packed with supporters of Ethiopia, was reluctant to vote and terminate Eritrea's federal status. The federation was unilaterally terminated by Ethiopia, although the Emperor's government claimed it had only accepted the Eritrean wishes through a 'unanimous vote' from its representatives to end it. The Assembly had no say at all on the matter. It neither considered the issue nor made a vote. Its members were forcefully gathered and informed that the federation was terminated and Eritrea to be united to its Motherland.

Ethiopia's gradual and systematic takeover of Eritrean autonomy and its unilateral abrogation of the federation disgruntled Eritreans. Seeing their autonomy vanished and their territory annexed to a feudal empire they opted to resist Ethiopia the hard way, through an armed struggle.

Final Conclusion

This study has attempted to explain how the Eritrean Assembly was operating in the decade-long life of the disgruntled Eritrean-Ethiopian federation and the role it played in defending and destroying Eritrean autonomy. It also tried to explain the role and actions of the Ethiopian government in the federation which eventually led to the demise of the arrangement.

The Eritrean-Ethiopian federation was principally a faulty association which tried to create a marriage between two incompatible systems, a link between an absolute feudal monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. It lacked an equivalence on the political systems of the parties in the arrangement. For Emperor Haile Selassie, democracy in Eritrea was a clear threat to his power since the rest of his empire remained feudal and monarchical. In the views of the Ethiopian government, therefore, the federal arrangement and the presence of an autonomous Eritrea were perceived as obstacles to the centralization of power. It would be naivety to expect the Emperor, whose government had no exposure to democratic rule, to tolerate an autonomy and a flourishing democracy in Eritrea, which were absolutely contrary to his system. The federation was therefore, not only a threat to Emperor Haile Selassie's government but also beyond its capacity to manage it.

When such political reality coupled with the Ethiopian government's unwavering territorial claims on Eritrea, it proved deadly to the life of the federation. The Ethiopian government accepted the federal association of the two countries as a mere return of a "lost province" into the empire. Hence, Eritrea was never accepted as a partner in the Federation. This uncompromising posture of Ethiopia was the main impediment for the progress of the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation. In the immediate outset of the Federation, therefore, the Ethiopian government started to undermine the autonomy of Eritrea and its democratic institutions. The promising start of the Eritrean government, a regime established with democratic principles and having key features of democratic rule such as a constitution, an Assembly, an independent judiciary and a flourishing free press, was therefore curtailed in the early years of the federation.

If we look into the Eritrean sphere, the perceptions of Eritreans towards their autonomy and their reaction either in safeguarding or destroying it, was highly influenced by their perception and relation with Ethiopia. Throughout the British and the Federal periods, Eritreans were socially and political divided. The perception and ideology of the competing social and political groups in Eritrea and their relation to the Ethiopian state was highly influenced by ethnicity and religion. This was vividly articulated in the bitter struggles between the Unionists and the anti-unionists, mainly the Muslim League. These rival forces had no consensus on the fundamental question of the Eritrean nation. Both group having aimed at securing maximum access to the power of the state and suspicious of each other opted to operate in a different direction. The Muslim League and its adherents with an anticipatory fear of domination by Ethiopia rejected any closer political association with the Ethiopian state. Conversely, the Unionists with an anticipatory hope that their position could be better served by a close political association with the Ethiopian state endeavored for political unity with Ethiopia. Under their respective assumptions, both camps operated to protect their respective interests. As these groups were the major forces that constituted the core of the Eritrean Assembly, the attainment of these political objectives clearly transpired in the Eritrean Assembly's operation. While anti-unionists vied for the protection of Eritrean autonomy, Unionists worked for its destruction.

Throughout the federation years, holding the federal authority and with no outside body monitoring its actions, Ethiopia was free to dictate matters as it saw fit. The violation of the Federal Act and the attack on Eritrean autonomy, however, generated a notable opposition during the term of the first Eritrean Assembly. The struggle to maintain Eritrean autonomy was centered among a group of federalists in the Eritrean Assembly, majority of them Muslims which had more suspicion and apprehension towards Ethiopia. Although constantly harassed by the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments, a small band of federalist members of the Assembly fought hard to protect Eritrean autonomy and maintain the integrity of the Federation. The Assembly's prominent federalist figures such as Ibrahim Sultan, Kadi Ali Omar, *Abba* Habtemariam Nugurru, Omar Akito, Saleh Musa Abudawud and others attempted to safeguard the rights of Eritrea in the federation. They send several petitions to the Emperor, his representative in Eritrea and the UN, the architect of the federal plan which became reluctant to monitor the progress and proper implementation of the very arrangement it devised.

Although it had demonstrated a considerable opposition against the violation of the Federal Act and Eritrean autonomy, the first Eritrean Assembly did not succeed in fully safeguarding Eritrean autonomy mainly due to the polarized socio-political position of the groups it had consisted. The social and political divisions and rivalry of the groups in the Assembly severely paralyzed the Assembly. When diverse social and political groups with different objectives operate together it is hard to reach a consensus. In its operation the Eritrean Assembly basically lacked a common national vision. The influential figures in the Assembly were more concerned to promote their respective political and group interests and there was no space among them to compromise and bargain.

The presence of a dominant Unionist faction, a group which had campaigned for unconditional union with Ethiopia, in the Assembly largely contributed to the failure of the Assembly's effort to maintain Eritrean autonomy. Although a few of them were gradually turned federalists, the majority delegates of the Unionists were not willing to stand by the cause of Eritrean autonomy in the event of its violation. Preserving one's social position and promoting group interests also weakened the power of the Eritrean Assembly. The case of the Muslim League of the Western Province (MLWP), a group with significant influence in the Assembly's operation, was exemplary. Aiming to hit at the Muslim League, whose political activity severely hampered the patrimonial power of most the chief in Western Province, for most of the period the MLWP made tactical alliance with the Unionists. The alliances of the Unionists and MLWP showed how social and political groups irrespective of their political agendas and differences forge an alliance to serve common interest. Hence, the power of the Muslim League, a group that vied to maintain Eritrean autonomy, in the Assembly was contained by the alliance of the Unionists and the MLWP.

The failure of the Unionist dominated Eritrean leadership to question and challenge the actions of the Ethiopian government and rather its devotion to the Ethiopian position also heavily jeopardized Eritrean autonomy. For the most part the divided Eritrean Assembly also failed to push the Eritrean leadership for an accountability. The attack on the Eritrean autonomy became fatal when in 1955 a bonding bridge between the Ethiopian and Eritrean executive was created with the appointment of the vice representative of the Emperor to the post of Chief Executive of the Eritrean government.

Creating a subordinate leadership in the Eritrean government, the Crown successfully prevented the return of the federalist group of the first Eritrean Assembly into the Second. As elections are subject to political manipulations and mechanisms through which political agendas were executed, the 1956 elections ably used to make sure that the Assembly seats were filled with people devoted for the cause of union with Ethiopia. The 1956 rigid election, therefore, expelled all the federalist elements of the previous Assembly to give Ethiopia a free hand to manipulate the Assembly. Through the combined efforts of the Crown's Representative and the Eritrean Executive, the second Eritrean Assembly became a tool of the palace. In its four years' term in office, the Assembly easily guided to enact several legislations that severely compromised the autonomy of Eritrea. Many of these legislations were propositions which the previous Assembly refute.

The Emperor in his part skillfully destroyed Eritrean autonomy through bribery, deception, blandishment, and intimidation. He took every possible opportunity to weaken Eritrea's federal status and bring her more close to his rule. As part of the process the Eritrean Assembly became a chief target of the Crown. The Assembly was, therefore, purposely weakened. It was packed with traditional chiefs, people with insufficient exposure to education and no knowhow to the intricate system of Assembly politics, and more preferably with faithful elements. Consequently, members of the Eritrean Assembly, mainly those in the second and third Assemblies, were easily manipulated by the Crown's representative. The few dissident members were bribed and coerced that their posture came in line to the Ethiopian position or at least compelled to remain neutral.

The socio-economic situation of the period was effectively manipulated by the Ethiopian government to promote its political agenda. The weak economic position of Assembly members and their ambition to power gave an impetus to the successful execution of Emperor's Eritrean policy. As a matter of fact many members were dependent on their double salary, one from the Eritrean government and the other from the palace, for living. Many of them were also given traditional positions as chiefs for which they were paid. These circumstances had huge impact in influencing the political stances members had. In the presence of an overwhelming pressure from the federal and Eritrean authorities, it would be hard to expect Assembly members to work against their personal or group interests.

The Third Eritrean Assembly had similar nature to the Second. Like its predecessor, it was erected with large interference of authorities in the elections and was staffed with carefully selected people. However, with the key pillars of Eritrean autonomy dismantled by its predecessor, the third Eritrean Assembly's role in the dismemberment of the federation was insignificant. This Assembly was in no position either to defend or destruct the Eritrean autonomy. Nonetheless, in a hope that it could give the Ethiopian government a sufficient legal ground to annul the Federation, the Crown made a massive effort initially to convince and later to coerce the third Eritrean Assembly to vote for Eritrea's complete union with Ethiopia.

One important issue that this study clarified is the final role the Eritrean Assembly in the dissolution of the federation. So far two versions of Eritrea's annexation exist: one by a unanimous vote from the Assembly and the other by imperial decree. The dominant discourse in the existing literature indicates the was a "unanimous vote" from the Eritrean Assembly in favor of ending the federation. Research result of this study affirms that, although throughout the federation years the Eritrean Assembly played a considerable role in destroying Eritrean autonomy, the Assembly never voted to end of the federal arrangement. It was claimed by the Ethiopian State and still asserted in some academic and public discourses that the Eritrean Assembly "unanimously voted" for union with Ethiopia. This is a misleading information. The fact is that the Assembly had no voice on the matter. Eritrea's fate was determined by the Emperor's government and the termination of the federation was the sole decision of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian government declared the federation null and void without securing the Eritrean grassroots' support. It gradually destroyed the Federation through creating a collaborative class in the Eritrean leadership and by weakening the Eritrean Assembly. Initially the Emperor's divide and rule policy was paying in the socially divided Eritrean political sphere. His policy in the long term, however, proved futile and became rather harmful to both countries. The Emperor's government failed to convince the vast majority of Eritreans of the advantage for Union. It rather attempted to contain Eritrean opposition through might. Throughout the federation years, popular resentment to Ethiopian rule and political struggle to keep an autonomous Eritrea was mounting. The growing political struggles to desist the Ethiopian government from its action were unsuccessful and the Federation was dissolved without popular support. Seeing their autonomy vanish and their territory forcibly incorporated into the Ethiopian empire, Eritreans were

convinced that the way to deal Ethiopia was through an armed resistance. The Eritrean armed struggle for independence was launched in response to Ethiopia's gradual and unconvincing takeover of Eritrea. The dissolution of the Eritrean-Ethiopian federation had fatal effects. The protracted war that followed ravaged and destroyed both countries. The long struggle against Ethiopian hegemony claimed thirty years to give Eritreans the right for self determination.

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Appendices

1. Text of Resolution 390 A (V) Adopted on December 2, 1950 by the General Assembly of the United Nations*

A

WHEREAS by paragraph 3 of annex XI to the Treaty of Peace with Italy, 1947, the powers concerned have agreed to accept the recommendation of the General Assembly on the disposal of the former Italian colonies in Africa and to take appropriate measures for giving effect to it,

WHEREAS by the paragraph 2 of the aforesaid Annex XI such disposal is to be made in the light of the wishes and welfare of the inhabitants and the interest of peace and security, taking into consideration the views of interested governments,

NOW THEREFORE

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY in the light of the reports of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea and the Interim Committee, and

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 development need for adequate access to the sea,

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the importance of assuring the continuing collaboration of the foreign communities in the economic development of Eritrea,

RECOGNIZING that the disposal of Eritrea should be based on its close political and economic association with Ethiopia and,

DESIRING that this association assure to the inhabitants of Eritrea the fullest respect and safeguards for their institutions, traditions, religions and languages, as well as the widest possible measure of self-government, while at the same time respecting the constitution, institutions, and the international status and identity of the Empire of Ethiopia,

* Source: RDC/HIS/FED/96/Acc. No. 01892.

A. RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopia Crown.
2. The Eritrean Government shall possess legislative, executive and judicial powers in the field of domestic affairs.
3. The jurisdiction of the Federal Government shall extend to the following matter defense, foreign affairs, currency and finance, foreign and interstate commerce and external and interstate communications, including ports. The Federal Government shall have the right to impose uniform taxes throughout the Federation to meet the expenses of federal functions and services, it being understood that the assessment and the collection of such taxes in Eritrea are to be delegated to the Eritrean Government, and provided that Eritrea shall bear only its just and equitable share of these expenses. The jurisdiction of the Eritrean Government shall extend to all matters not vested in the Federal Government, including the power to maintain the internal police, to levy taxes to meet the expenses of domestic functions and services, and to adopt its own budget.
4. The area of the federation shall constitute a single area for customs purposes, and there shall be no barrier to the free movements of goods and persons within the area. Customs duties on goods entering or leaving the Federation, which have their final destination or origin in Eritrea, shall be assigned to Eritrea.
5. An Imperial Federal Council composed of equal numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean representatives shall meet at least once a year and shall advise upon the common affairs of the Federation referred to in paragraph 3 above. The citizen of Eritrea shall participate in the executive and judicial branches, and shall be represented in the legislative branch, of the Federal Government, in accordance with law and in the proportion that the population of Eritrea bears to the population of the Federation.
6. A single nationality shall prevail throughout the Federation:
 - (a) All inhabitants of Eritrea, except persons possessing foreign nationality, shall be nationals of the Federation;
 - (b) All inhabitants born in Eritrea and have in at least one indigenous parent or grandparent shall also be nationals of the Federation. Such persons, if in possession of a foreign nationality. Shall, within six months of the coming into force of the Eritrean Constitution, be free to opt to renounce the nationality of the Federation and retain such foreign nationality. In the event that they do not so opt, they shall thereupon lose such foreign nationality;
 - (c) The qualifications of persons acquiring the nationality of the Federation under sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) above for exercising their rights as citizens of Eritrea shall be determined by the Constitution and laws of Eritrea;

- (d) All persons possessing foreign nationality who have resided in Eritrea for ten years prior to the date of the adoption of the present resolution shall have the right, without further requirements of residence, to apply for the nationality of the Federation in accordance with Federal laws. Such persons who do not thus acquire the nationality of the Federation shall be permitted to reside in and engage in peaceful and lawful pursuits in Eritrea;

The rights and interests of foreign nationals resident in Eritrea shall be guaranteed in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 7.

- 7. The Federal Government, as well as Eritrea, shall ensure to residents in Eritrea, without distinction of nationality, race, sex, language or religion, the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental liberties, including the following:

- (a) The right to equality before the law. No discrimination shall be made against foreign enterprises in existences in Eritrea engaged in industrial, commercial, agricultural, artisan, educational or charitable activities, nor against banking institutions and insurance companies operating in Eritrea;
- (b) The right to life, liberty and security of person
- (c) The right to own and dispose of property. No one shall be deprived of property, including contractual rights. Without due process of law and without payment of just and effective compensation;
- (d) The right of freedom of opinion and expression and the right of adopting and practicing any creed or religion;
- (e) The right to education;
- (f) The right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association;
- (g) The right to inviolability of correspondence and domicile, subject to the requirements of the law;
- (h) The right to exercise any profession subject to the requirements of the law;
- (i) No one shall be subject to arrest or detention without an order of a competent authority, except in case of flagrant and serious violation of the law in force. No one shall be deported except in accordance with the law;
- (j) The right to a fair and equitable trial, the right of petition to the Emperor and the right of appeal to the Emperor for commutation of death sentences;
- (k) Retroactivity of penal law shall be excluded;

The respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the requirements of public order and the general welfare alone will justify any limitations to the above rights.

8. Paragraphs 1 to 7 inclusive of the present resolution shall constitute the Federal Act, which shall be submitted to the Emperor of Ethiopia for ratification.
9. There shall be a transition period, which shall not extend beyond 15 September 1952, during which the Eritrean Government will be organized and the Eritrean Constitution prepared and put in to effect.
10. There shall be a United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea appointed by the General Assembly. The Commissioner will be assisted by experts appointed by the Secretary General of the United Nations.
11. During the transition period, the present Administering Authority shall continue to conduct the affairs of Eritrea. It shall, in the consultation with the United Nations Commissioner, prepare as rapidly as possible the organization of an Eritrean administration, induct Eritreans into all levels of the administration, and make arrangements for and convoke a representative of Assembly of Eritreans chosen by the people. It may, in arrangement with the Commissioner, negotiate on behalf of the Eritreans a temporary customs union with Ethiopia to be put in to effect as soon as practicable.
12. The United Nations Commissioner shall, in consultation with the Administering Authority, the Government of Ethiopia, and the inhabitants of Eritrea, prepare a draft of the Eritrean Constitution to be submitted to the Eritrean Assembly and shall advise and assist the Eritrean Assembly in its consideration of the Constitution. The constitution of Eritrea shall be based on the principles of democratic government, shall include the guarantees contained in paragraph 7 of the Federal Act, shall be consistent with the provisions of the Federal Act and shall contain provisions adopting and ratifying the Federal Act on behalf of the people of Eritrea.
13. The Federal Act and the Constitution of Eritrea shall enter in to effect following ratification of the Federal Act by the Emperor of Ethiopia, and following approval by the Commissioner, adoption by the Eritrean Assembly and ratification by the Emperor of Ethiopia of the Eritrean Constitution.
14. Arrangements shall be made by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as the Administering Authority for the transfer of power to the appropriate authorities. The transfer of power shall take place as soon as the Eritrean Constitution and the Federal Act enter in to effect, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 13 above.
15. The United Nations Commissioner shall maintain his headquarters in Eritrea until the transfer of power has been completed, and shall make appropriate reports to the General Assembly of the United Nations concerning the discharge of his functions. The Commissioner may consult with the Interim Committee of the General Assembly with respect to the discharge of his functions in the light of developments and within the terms of the present resolution. When the transfer of authority has been completed, he shall so report to the General Assembly and submit to it the text of the Eritrean Constitution;

B. AUTHORIZES the Secretary-General, in accordance with established practice:

1. To arrange for the payment of an appropriate remunerations to the United Nations Commissioner;
2. To provide the United Nations Commissioner with such experts, staff and facilities as the Secretary-General may consider necessary to carry out the terms of the present resolution.

2. Reunion of Eritrea

Proclamation

Order No. 27 of 1962*

An Order to provide for the Termination of the Federal Status of Eritrea and Application to Eritrea of the System of Unitary Administration of the Empire of Ethiopia.

CONQUERING LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH...HAILE SELASSIE I ELECT OF GOD,
EMPEROR OF ETHIOPIA

WHEREAS, on the 11th September, 1952 the Territory of Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown; and

WHEREAS, the people of Eritrea have become progressively to realize the disadvantages flowing from the federal system of administration and have increasingly and repeatedly requested the abolition of this system, which they have never sought, and application to Eritrea of the system of unitary, administration presently uniformly applied throughout the Empire; and

WHEREAS, the Eritrean Assembly, 1962, has expressed the will of the people of Eritrea that the federal system of administration be terminated and that Eritrea be wholly integrated into unitary system of administration of the Empire of Ethiopia;

NOW THEREFORE, in recognition of the desires of the people of Eritrea convinced that the pace of the economic and social development of the Empire of Ethiopia has been adversely affected by the application of the federal system of administration, and taking into account the resolution unanimously adopted by the parliament of the Empire of Ethiopia on 15th November, 1962 giving full support to the resolution of the Eritrean Assembly, We hereby order as follows:

1. This order may be cited as the "Termination of the federal Status of Eritrea and application to Eritrea of the system of Unitary Administration of the Empire of Ethiopia Order, 1962."
2. The federal status of Eritrea with Ethiopia is hereby terminated and Eritrea which continues to constitute an integral part of the Empire of Ethiopia, is hereby wholly integrated into the unitary system of administration of Our Empire.
3. The Revised Constitution of Ethiopia given by Us as the Sovereign and Crown of the Empire of Ethiopia on 2nd November, 1955 shall continue to be the sole and exclusive Constitution to apply uniformly throughout the territory of the Empire of Ethiopia.
4. All rights, including the right to own and dispose of real property, exemptions, concessions and privileges of whatever nature heretofore granted, conferred or acquired within Eritrea, whether by law, order, contract or otherwise, and whether granted or conferred upon or acquired by Ethiopian or foreign persons, whether natural or legal, shall remain in full force and effect.

* Source: NEGARIT GAZETA, 22nd Year - No. 3, 15th November 1962.

5. All rights, powers, duties and obligations of the former Administration of Eritrea become, by virtue of this Order, the rights, powers, duties and obligations of the Imperial Ethiopian Government.

6. All enactments, laws and regulations or parts thereof which are presently in force within Eritrea or which are denominated to be of federal application, to the extent that the application thereof is necessary to the continued operation of existing administrations, shall until such time as the same shall be expressly replaced and repealed by subsequently enacted legislation, remain in full force and effect, and existing administration shall continue to implement and administer the same under the authority of the Imperial Ethiopian Government.

7. This Order shall come into effect on 15th November, 1962.

TSAHAFFE TAEZAZ AKLILU HABTE WOLD

Prime Minister and Minister of Pen

3. Last Minute of the Eritrean Assembly*

THIRD LEGISLATURE

(No. 67)

MINUTE

Wednesday 14th November, 1962

The Vice-President took the chair at 10.30 a.m.

The Vice-President announced that H.E. the Chief Executive would come to the Assembly this morning to submit an important motion.

H.E. the Chief Executive, *Bitweded* Asfaha Woldemikael, together with the Secretaries of Executive Departments entered the Assembly room at 10.45 and delivered a speech (See Appendix "A" to these Minutes) and submitted the following motion:

WHEREAS we are aware that the name of 'Federation' finds no place in our history or in our traditions and;

WHEREAS we are convinced of the fact that it was imposed upon our people in order that it may constitute a weapon of disintegration in the hands of our enemies; and

WHEREAS we have realized that, as long as there will continue to operate the two systems and two administrations, which serves no purpose but waste our strength and energy, we shall not be able to carry out any project whatsoever for the benefit of our people;

WHEREAS interpreting the thoughts and aspirations of a people like ours who feel to be Ethiopian, we are convinced that it does not turn to the benefit of its unity to go on living according to the impositions dictated by others;

NOW THEREFORE, WE HEREBY UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVE that the Federation with all its significance and implications, be definitely abolished from this very moment; that from now on we live in a complete union with our Motherland Ethiopia; and we pray His Imperial Majesty our August and Beloved Sovereign, to ratify this RESOLUTION.

The above motion was adopted unanimously by acclamation of 60 Hon. Members present.

Thereupon the Vice-President made a speech (See Appendix "B" to these Minutes).

Finally, H.E. the Chief Executive made a brief speech thanking the Hon. Members for their wise and patriotic sentiments.

The Assembly Adjourned at 11.15 a.m.

* Source: RDC/Box 3/EA/ADM/Acc. No. 14012/Eritrean Assembly Archives.

4. Biographical Notes

Abiy Abebe, Lieutenant-General (ca. 1910-1974): Imperial Representative to Eritrea from late 1959 and first Governor-General. Abiy Abebe was a member of the Shewan nobility and son-in-law to Emperor Haile Selassie. He held Eritrea for the Emperor during the attempted coup of December 1960, and was consequently elevated to Minister of Interior. However, he retained his duties in Eritrea, and on July 12, 1962, narrowly escaped death in a bomb attack at Aqordat (Western Eritrea). In November he presided over Eritrea's annexation, and served as the province's first Governor-General until 1964, when he was elevated to President of the Ethiopian Senate. He was executed by the Derg in 1974. (See Killion and Connell, pp. 28-29)

Ali Mohammed Musa Radai, Sheikh (1913-1974): Leader of the Muslim League of the Western Province (MLWP) and first President of the Eritrean Assembly. Ali Radai was born in Keren, where he attended colonial school and became a merchant. He was elected Secretary of the Keren branch of the Muslim League in 1946, becoming an influential figure in the organization until he clashed with Ibrahim Sultan in 1950 in a personal conflict apparently abetted by the British Administration, which had won Ali Radai's tacit support for their plan to partition Eritrea between Sudan and Ethiopia. Ali Radai then formed the MLWP, which called for a British trusteeship over the western lowlands, Sahel and Senhit, pending their eventual merger with Sudan. Outright partition was never publicly advocated, because of the recent war between the Beni-Amer and their Hadendowa kinsmen in Sudan, but the new party captured fourteen seats in the first Assembly, and formed a coalition with Tedla Bairu's Unionist Party to insure pro-Ethiopian control over Eritrea's autonomous government. For this, Ali Radai was despised by his fellow Muslims, and in July 1955 he was forced to resign along with Tedla Bairu. The new Chief Executive, Asfaha Weldemikael, gave him a cabinet post and he served the Ethiopian government until 1974, when he was assassinated by the ELF. (See Killion and Connell, p. 64)

Andargachew Messai, Bitweded (ca.1905-ca.1976): Son-in-law of Emperor Haile Selassie, Andargachew served as Imperial Representative in Eritrea from 1952 to 1959. His office was intended to represent the interests of the Ethiopian crown within the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation, but Andargachew from the beginning acted more as "Governor-General" than figurehead, moving into the colonial governor's palace or *Ghebbi*, and delivering his first speech to the Eritrean Assembly in Amharic, to the dismay of his audience. He asserted Federal (Ethiopian) control over many of Eritrea's assets, and in his third address to the Assembly, on March 28, 1955, he made the Ethiopian position on Eritrea's supposed internal autonomy explicit by stating that, "as far the Office of His Imperial Majesty's Representative is concerned, no internal or external affairs of Eritrea do exist or will in the future." Andargachew was instrumental in destroying Eritrea's autonomy in the Federation, but by 1959 his arrogant manner was deemed counter-productive by the Emperor, who replaced him with another son-in-law, Abiy Abebe. (See Killion and Connell, pp. 70-71)

Asfaha Weldemikael, Bitweded (1914-2002): The second Eritrean Chief Executive and key figure in the dismemberment of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation, Asfaha's career symbolizes Haile Selassie I's recruitment of former Italian colonial functionaries during the 1940s, and their rise to high political positions. Born in Akur, Akele Guzai, Asfaha was a devout Catholic who attended the Italian primary school in Sageneiti and served the colonial government as an

interpreter from 1932 to 41. When Haile Selassie returned to power, Asfaha was in Addis Ababa, where he joined the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' team working to gain control over Eritrea, becoming President of the government-sponsored Association for Uniting Eritrea with Ethiopia. Upon Eritrea's federation with Ethiopia, Asfaha was appointed Imperial Vice-Representative under Andargachew Messai, and retained this position even after he was elected Chief Executive by the Eritrean Assembly on August 8, 1955, following the resignation of Tedla Bairu. Despite the fact he had never held an elective position; he served as Chief Executive until Eritrea's annexation in 1962, which he helped to organize, and presided over the dismantling of Eritrean political and social institutions. He played a leading role suppressing the 1958 General Strike and other early nationalist actions and organizations. After annexation he returned to Addis Ababa, where he served as minister of justice in the 1960s and 1970s. (See Killion and Connell, p. 94)

Dimetros Ghebremariam, *Melake Selam*, aka *Abba* (1900-1988): A leading figure in the Unionist Party, architect of Eritrea's 1962 annexation by Ethiopia, and an important reformer in the Orthodox Church, Dimetros was born in Areza, western Seraye. He received religious instruction in Gojjam, Chilga and Gondar (all in Ethiopia) and in 1922, became secretary to the leading Eritrean feudal dignitary and colonial collaborator, *Ras Kidanemariam Gebremeskel*. In 1929 he was among a select group of Eritrean clergy to be ordained by the Coptic Patriarch in Egypt, and in 1930 he was made responsible for his native Deqi Taes district in Seraye. Dimetros was politically ambitious, but also a vigorous proponent of modernizing and reforming the Orthodox Church to enable it to compete with European Christian sects. In 1942 he joined the Mahber Fiqri Hager (MFH) when his patron, *Ras Kidanemariam*, became its honorary president, and he went on to play an important role in mobilizing Eritreans to support union with Ethiopia through the Orthodox Church. He was elected to the Eritrean Assembly Deqi Taes in 1952, and in September 1955 became its vice president. Trusted by the Emperor's representative, Dimetros arranged the fall of Tedla Bairu and Ali Radai in 1955, after which he became the most powerful figure in the Assembly, pushing through a pro-Ethiopian legislative agenda that terminated most of Eritrea's autonomous institutions. Dimetros' fear of Islam's domination of Christianity in Eritrea brought him more to be an ardent supporter of union with Ethiopia which by the time was considered a Christian Empire. On October 30, 1961, he luckily survived an assassination attempt by Ghebremedhin Hailu who had been obstructed by him from taking his seat in the Assembly. Ghebremedhin died from wounds inflicted by Dimetros' bodyguards. The outpouring of mourners at Ghebremedhin's funeral indicated public hatred for Dimetros. Again he narrowly escaped assassination in the 1962 grenade attack on Abiy Abebe. Nonetheless, he pushed through the annexation of Eritrea in November, for which he was rewarded with the prestigious ecclesiastical post of *Nebure'ed* of Aksum in 1963. This office gave *Abba* Dimetros continued jurisdiction over Eritrean church affairs, and he was instrumental in developing the *Mahbere Hawariat* church printing press in Asmara, along with benevolent organizations, new church construction and the reform of church administration. In 1969 he became general administrator of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Addis Ababa and later vice president of the Ethiopian Senate. Ironically, he was imprisoned by the Derg for eleven months in 1975, and died in 1988 in Addis Ababa and was given a state funeral in a church he had built in Asmara. (See Killion and Connell, pp. 180-181, Bocresion, p. 201-202, 230-234 and *Etiopia*, October 2, 1955)

Ibrahim Sultan Ali, Sheikh (1909-1987): A Leading nationalist politician of the 1940s and founder of the Muslim League (*Al-Rabita Al-Islamiya Al-Eritriyya*). Born in Keren, where he studied in Islamic and Italian colonial schools, Ibrahim joined the Eritrean railroad where he worked as a chief conductor during 1922-26. He served the Italian administration in its Muslim Native Affairs section from 1926-41, rising to head its Eritrean staff. He continued in this position under the British Administration until 1943, when his critiques of European racism forced his retirement to Tessenei, where he founded a creamery. His involvement in politics began with his founding role in the MFH in 1941, and during 1943-45 he organized the revolt of Tigre serfs against their Shumagulle lords, laying the foundation for a new political movement, the Muslim League, which elected him Secretary-General in December, 1946. As head of the Muslim League, Ibrahim worked with the British to see all the serfs emancipated by 1949, and he presented the views of Muslim Eritreans to the Commissions of Investigation of the Four Powers and the UN, attending the Lake Success session of the UN in 1949, where he was instrumental in forming the Independence Bloc together with Weldeab Weldemariam and others. Ibrahim attempted to dominate Muslim politics, however, incurring the animosity of other aspiring leaders and contributing to the destruction of the League in 1950, when Ali Mohammed Musa Radai led most of the Beni-Amer and other western tribes out of the organization and into the MLWP. Unlike Ali Radai and others, Ibrahim refused to compromise on either the territorial integrity of Eritrea or its future independence, but he accepted the Federation when it came, and was elected to the first Eritrean Assembly 1952, where he led the opposition to Tedla Bairu's Unionist Party, conspiring with pro-Ethiopian forces to bring Tedla's fall in 1955. This move, however, brought Ethiopian control and Ibrahim's exclusion from the second Assembly in 1956, after which he participated in efforts to re-involve the UN in Eritrea's affairs to block Ethiopian annexation. Ibrahim left Eritrea in March 1959 for Cairo, where he joined the growing exile group. But his attempts to dominate exile politics failed, and though he remained a symbolic figure and made numerous speeches and petitions on behalf of the Eritrean cause, he alienated many of his potential colleagues in both the ELM and ELF. After initially failing to work with either Weldeab or the ELM, in 1962 he helped them petition the UN in New York, and eventually joined the opposition Unity Movement in the late 1960s. By the 1970s he was completely marginalized, but his status was rehabilitated after 1982, when he joined the EPLF's call for a national united front, sending a taped message that was played at the EPLF's Second Congress in 1987. He died shortly thereafter, on September 1, 1987, and was eulogized by Weldeab, with whom he has taken his place as one of the "father figures" of the Eritrean nation. (See Killion and Connell, pp. 306-307)

Idris Mohammed Adem, Sheikh (1921-2003): A Leading figure in the early nationalist movement and founder of the ELF, Idris Mohammed Adem was born into the Daga sub-tribe of the Beni-Amer in Aqordat in 1921. He attended an Arabic secondary school in Gedaref, Sudan, and returned to Aqordat with the British Administration in 1941 to serve as official secretary for the Beni-Amer *Diglal* (Chief). Idris wrote for the Arabic language edition of the Eritrean Weekly News, and his early politics favored the partition schemes of the British and, later, the MLWP. He was elected to the Eritrean Assembly in 1952, and in 1955 joined forces with Ibrahim Sultan and others to secure the ouster of Tedla Bairu and Ali Radai, replacing the latter as President of the Assembly on 28 July. After this Idris became an increasingly belligerent nationalist leader, fighting for an independent electoral commission, which led to his removal from office in June 1956, and petitioning the UN, which led to his house arrest in 1957. In March 1959, together with Ibrahim Sultan, Idris fled to Sudan and later to Egypt. In Cairo, Idris canvassed support for

the idea of starting an armed rebellion against Ethiopian rule. He distrusted the already existing ELM, particularly because of its socialist and secular ideology, and he derided the strategies of Ibrahim, Weldeab Weldemariam and others who focused on the UN. Instead, Idris worked with student activists and fellow Muslims from western Eritrea to form the core of a new movement, the ELF. Idris remained a leading figure ELF and as the front grew he became the patron of its Beni-Amer and western units providing them with arms and supplies through his connections in the Arab world. He maintained his power even after ELF's internal dissent began in 1967, and in 1971 he was elected Chairman of the Revolutionary Council. But his drive for personal control and his hard-line stance against leftist and Christian dissidents led directly to the outbreak of civil war in 1972. With the rise of a new generation of leaders, Idris was increasingly isolated, and he was not re-elected in 1975. Idris continued to work as a fund-raiser in the Arab world, and was involved in the many attempts by Saudi Arabia to build an Islamist organization among the more conservative ELF Factions during 1982-1985. (See Killion and Connell pp. 307-308)

Tedla Bairu, *Dejazmatch* (1914-1984): Eritrea's first Chief Executive and leader of the Unionist Party, Tedla Bairu was born in Gheremi, Hamasien. He attended the Swedish Evangelical Mission School in Asmara until 1926 and was one of the very few Eritreans to study in Italy, where he graduated from the Istituto Magistrale in Florence in 1933. He was a teacher and then director of Italian "native" schools until 1940, ending this career in Adwa, where he was employed by the British Administration as an interpreter in 1941. He served as a translator in the Asmara Native Affairs Office of the BMA until 1946, and was the first director of the *Semunawi Gazette*, a newspaper published during British Administration. Tedla was not in Asmara when the MFH was founded in May 1941, but he became involved in the organization upon his return to Eritrea. Tedla Bairu did not support Eritrean independence, and instead became a vocal advocate of the pro-Ethiopian unionist cause. He left the BMA in late 1946, and at the *Bet-Ghiorghis* meeting in November he led the Unionist wing of the MFH in rejecting Weldeab's proposed compromise. With Ethiopian support, Tedla replaced Gebremeskel Weldu as Secretary-General of what became the Unionist Party in January 1947. Tedla led this organization through the 1940s, addressing various UN bodies, editing the Unionist newspaper *Etiopia* and mobilizing sectarian and regionalist interests for the Unionist cause. Described by his opponents as an "opportunist," Tedla's unwavering Unionist position and personal patronage network led to his unopposed election to the first Eritrean Assembly for his home district of Karneshim in March, 1952. He was elected President of the Assembly in April and became Eritrea's first Chief Executive when the Federation established. In 1953, Tedla worked hand-in-hand with Ethiopian authorities to destroy Eritrea's independent institutions. He refused to consult with the Eritrean Assembly concerning the budget, and undermined the independence of the Police and judiciary. At the same time, Tedla tried to use Eritrea's autonomous institutions to develop an Eritrean power base for himself independent of Emperor Haile Selassie's share of custom revenues by Ethiopia and sought independent economic relationships with Italian capitalists. He came into conflict with the Emperor's representative, Andargachew Messai, and by 1955 had alienated both his Ethiopian patrons and his Eritrean compatriots. In July he resorted to the imposition of a British Administration emergency law suspending habeas corpus and closed the Eritrean Assembly, citing a resurgence of *Shifta* (Banditry) activity. This measure backfired, however, and on July 28, 1955, the Emperor forced his resignation. This was celebrated as a victory by Eritrean independents, but in reality Tedla's fall only further undermined Eritrean autonomy by destroying what little independence the Unionist Party had maintained. According some who knew him, Tedla already had become "disillusioned" with the

Federation by 1955, and his ambiguous commitment to Eritrean autonomy led to his increasing support for the Eritrean nationalist movement in the 1960s. After leaving his post as the Chief Executive of Eritrea, the Emperor posted Tedla Bairu to Sweden as Ethiopian ambassador for a period of years before he was recalled to Addis Ababa and later retired into the Ethiopian senate from which he defected to the ELF in 1967. That year, he was appointed to the Supreme Council of ELF and made a number of nationalist radio broadcasts on behalf of the front and later Osman Saleh Sabbe's (one of the ELF's prominent leadership) General Secretariat, but this was purely a symbolic role. His son, Herui Tedla Bairu, on the other hand, became very active in ELF politics. Tedla continued to live in Stockholm until his death in 1984. (See Killion and Connell pp. 493-495 and Tedla Bairu's interview with Franco Pierini, Stockholm)

Tedla Uqbit, Brigadier-General (?-1963): an ardent Unionist who persistently worked and assisted the annexation of Eritrea. Trained under the British, Tedla Uqbit became one of the most feared Eritrean personalities during the Federation years. In 1951 the British Administration sent him for study to England. In November 1954, alongside with two other police officers, dismissed by the Chief Executive on the grounds of redundancy. Tedla Uqbit resigned from his post rather than accept a transfer to a civilian position, giving his reason that his dismissal had been due to his strong support for Union. His case was taken up by the palace, and with pressure from the Federal government, in May 1955 the Chief Executive forced to appoint Tedla Uqbit as deputy Police Commissioner with the rank of Major. In September 1955 replaced the departing Police Commissioner of Eritrea, the Briton Colonel Wright, Tedla became the Police Commissioner of Eritrea. Later in his capacity as Commissioner of Police, Tedla was to be responsible, for the dismantling of the federation. During the 1956 Assembly elections he was at the forefront in harassing anti-Unionist candidates. Although free to harass, he remained accountable to the Eritrean Supreme Court, which was headed by Sir James Shearer. Tedla Uqbit was known for his ruthless suppression of actual and anticipated dissension so that by the beginning of 1960 he had managed to muffle all signs of opposition in Eritrea. The departure of Sir James Shearer in 1959 gave him absolute power and a free hand to jail anyone with impunity. In June 1962, for his unwavering service to Ethiopia, Tedla was promoted from colonel to Brigadier-General by Emperor Haile Selassie and bestowed the title of "Commander of the order of the Honor of Ethiopia." During the abolition of the Federation he was the busiest man to make sure all Eritrean Assembly members available for the intended final vote to terminate the Federation. Surprisingly, nine months after the fall of the Federation he lost his life in confrontation with the regime he loyally served for years. When his power was considerably minimized by the Governor-General, Abiy Abebe, he began to resent Ethiopian rule and objected order. Eventually, Tedla declared that he had restored the Federation and ordered all his subordinates including all police heads of each division in the territory, to stay in standby position until further order. In his futile attempt of restoring the federation back, he had contacted the UN Secretary General, Mr. U-Thant through the consulate of the United Kingdom in Asmara. Governor-General Abiy Abebe ordered the arrest of Tedla and on June 11, 1963 his police headquarter was encircled by the Ethiopian army. Amid negotiation with Ethiopian army officers, it was pronounced that Tedla Uqbit had committed suicide. Although official reports claimed the same, his death is still mysterious. The same day Colonel Zer'emariam Azzazi, his deputy, was promoted to Police Commissioner of Eritrea. (See Tekeste, pp. 102-103, 117-118, 124-125, 136, *Zemen*, June 27, 1962, and "Examination Archive on the death of Brigadier General Tedla Uqbit," June 20, 1963)