

Review article

- (1) *The Crown and the Pen: The Memoirs of a Lawyer Turned Rebel*, The Red Sea Press Inc., 2007
- (2) *A Wounded Nation: How a Once Promising Eritrea was Betrayed and its Future Compromised*, Volume II of the *Crown and the Pen*, Red Sea Press, 2011, by Bereket Habte Selassie.

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These two volumes are presented as the memoirs (autobiography) of the author. Professor Bereket has the combined experience of a public servant, academic and activist accrued during a long involvement in the politics of mainly Ethiopia but, to some extent, also of Eritrea, straddling the major part of the last five decades. He is also an exemplary representative of the “Ethiopianized” Eritrean intelligentsia whose fate it was to bear the brunt of injustice and discrimination meted out by the two Ethiopian political systems it served.

It was therefore hoped, indeed taken for granted, that these two volumes would be written in a manner befitting his academic credentials and considerable experience, and thus become treasure troves which would provide readers with meaningful insights into the socio-economic, cultural and political landscape of both Eritrea and Ethiopia; provide accurate, detailed and balanced information on the major issues of the times, and the major actors which, by their contributions, had become icons and/or forces of nature in both Ethiopia and Eritrea; sustain or dispel some popularly held myths and beliefs and offer personal reflections on how he, as an individual “public figure” (as he claims to have been), had influenced his time.

It was also hoped, and expected, that the books would be great reference resources for educators and students as well as practitioners and, in particular, an inspiration to coming generations of Eritreans and Ethiopians.

Any meaningful autobiography (or memoir) must be graced with quality and depth, emphasizing content as well as form, must be thoroughly researched and documented (especially when reference is made to other persons) and must be thought-provoking, objective and responsible. It is the height of moral irresponsibility when, and if, it liberally impinges on the private lives of individuals. Autobiography-and memoir-writing does accept certain constraints, such as the non-revelation of facts which may not in any way contribute to the essence or completeness of the work but would certainly impact negatively on the social and political relations of people and the emotions, feelings and attitudes of their offsprings, families and close friends. It becomes unacceptable especially when the “facts” end up being speculations or, worse, manufactured. This would be the prime example of the art of negative discourse.

It is understood that it is well nigh humanly impossible for any memoir to be absolutely objective. It is also accepted that there will always be different interpretations and judgments of events. On the other hand, there is serious objection to any acts of distortion, demonization, and berating of, others as well as manufacturing scenarios, “facts” and conversations with the singular purpose of exalting oneself at the expense of others whom the author wants to be judged as he wants them to be.

It is deplorable when an autobiographer inflates his achievements, which he invariably attributes to his rare talents, and minimizes those of his colleagues, peers, seniors and other contemporaries which he often credits to their marital, social or even ethnic connections rather than their intellectual competencies. Yet, the author goes out of his way to inform the reader that what he had done was always right while what the others have done or said was invariably wrong or bad. Again, this is negative discourse.

It is therefore a source of sadness and pain to note that these two mediocre books, filled with wild assumptions, weird speculations, distortions, *ad hominem*s and invectives as well as fabricated scenarios, “facts” and fantasies, some eccentric and farcical, others outright lies. They have hardly any new information or profound analysis of events and the history, society and culture of Eritrea and Ethiopia. On the other hand, they contain many unsubstantiated and unsubstantiable claims and assertions, often related to persons who are not even alive to defend themselves. This, of course, invites serious questions about his integrity as a professional as well as his motives.

If the objective (purpose) of the books was to register the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth [the author declares that “the truth shall set you free” (Vol. I P 3)], then it is evident that “the truth” has become the very first victim of the memoirs since much information and evidence which could easily reveal the nature of the author’s political agenda, as well as his official, political and personal relations in Ethiopia and Eritrea have been willfully omitted, distorted or manifestly modified to suit his purposes or to suppress incriminating and/or embarrassing facts. It is on these standards that these books are being reviewed. It is impossible to present a detailed review of any but the major issues raised and the grotesque profligacies committed in the books, and this review will attend to not only the commission of fraudulence but also to the omission of relevant truths.

The first volume sets the stage with a prologue which introduces the reader to a sensationalized account of one of his presumably numerous encounters with none other than Emperor Haile-Selassie I himself, “the Sun King” as he described him (Vol. 2 P XVI), which he ended abruptly before the reader was informed about the outcome of the encounter.

This volume is divided into four parts containing sixteen chapters. The first part surveys, *inter-alia*, his childhood in his village and Asmara, the Eritrean capital; his journey south to Harar and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia; then to Great Britain for elementary, secondary and tertiary

(university) education respectively, followed by his “involuntary repatriation” to Ethiopia after only two years in Britain, and his eight months ordeal in Addis Ababa and Asmara as he tries to return to Britain; his successful return to Britain, the successful completion of his education and his triumphant return to Ethiopia.

The second part describes the process of his work assignment, supervised by **none other than the Emperor**; his relations with his seniors, peers and colleagues; his disgruntlement with the conservative group still upholding archaic traditional values; the other difficulties he encountered and his decision to resign from the government which was first rejected but later accepted because of his persistence; and his success in getting permission to pursue higher education in Britain where he was awarded the PH.D. by the University of London.

Chapters 11 and 12 describe his return to Ethiopia and his assignment first at the Ministry of Justice, where he became “Attorney General,” followed by appointment as Legal Advisor to the Governorate-General of Harar and Mayor of the City of Harar, the capital; return to Addis Ababa as Vice-Minister of Interior, his resignation from government and his employment at the World Bank in Washington D.C. where he served until the overthrow of the Imperial Government. He was to become the Deputy Chairman of the Inquiry Commission established by the new Military Government to review the “crimes” of the Senior Officials and Nobles of the Empire.

He briefly, but not adequately, describes his relationship with the first Chairman of the Military Government, officially known as The Provisional Military Administrative Committee (PMAC), Lt. General Aman-Mikael Andom and his two deputies, especially the one who succeeded the General after having him murdered, (i.e., Major/Lt. Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam). Not much after the completion of the work of the Inquiry Commission and the murder of General Aman, whom he claims as a relative (a claim rejected by many relatives of the distinguished General, including his elder sister) and close friend, he had to flee to the liberated areas of Eritrea because he claims he feared for his life. Unfortunately, the reader is not offered any insider insight into why he “feared” for his life i.e., what is it that he had (or had not) done, other than being a “confidante” of General Aman as others had been. The others, however, did not fear any harm-or suffer – as a result of such friendship or association.

More importantly, the reader is not offered any insider’s insight into, and a good framework for the understanding of, the cultural, social, and economic environment, as well as the institutions and political mood or the times immediately before and following the demise of the imperial regime/order.

The second volume is presented as an attempt to tell “the story of current Eritrean reality” and the “need to identify the burning issues of the times”. Incidentally, it is what he should have done about “Ethiopian” reality in the earlier volume. The first five chapters of the second volume focus on the author’s reflections on, and assessment of, the ethos of the liberation struggle. The rest of the book is a commentary on the major issues of the times and particularly the political

development in Eritrea after the 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia. It is devoted to specific issues such as land, ethnicity, language, state-religion relations, leadership, democracy, corruption and the “sins” of Eritrean politics (Vol. II P 12). It also repeatedly refers to the non-implementation of the Constitution which was drafted by a Commission he chaired and adopted by a “constituent assembly” of the Eritrean people, and its effects on nation-building and subsequent socio-economic development.

This would have been a magnificent contribution to both academia and the general public if the author had actually focused on the issues. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Any interested person who had followed, or participated in, the open public debate by Eritreans on these issues in the major Eritrean Websites in the aftermath of the war, will be quick to point out that these memoirs are not about helping the reader to have even a small glimpse of Eritrea and its problems or in the direction of its future.

In reality, they are simply crude and opportunistic attempts to dissociate himself with the EPLF/PFDJ, to ingratiate himself with, and to join, the presumably emerging opposition political forces and elites which he had assumed were favored by the gods and muses of the politics of the times, to explain and justify his past actions by reversing and/or revising his views on issues which hitherto had firmly echoed EPLF/PFDJ policies; and, when he could not thus cleanse himself, much as he had done when he had to abandon Ethiopia, by openly indulging in self-criticism and admitting mistakes. One excellent illustration of such behavior is his response to a critical article by Omer Jaber entitled “*Dr. Bereket Habte-Selassie: From the Unknown to the Uncertain*” on 2/3/2010 in Awate.com. To propitiate this new, and presumably the soon-to-be member of a governing elite, he embarks on a sustained vitriolic and often self-contradicting, demonization of, and propaganda campaign against, the EPLF/PFDJ, its leadership, its supporters and “purveyors” while lavishing praise on the various opposition groups and leaders. (See, for example, Awate Vol. I)

The author has stressed the need for being truthful and solemnly declares that “my own view is that those of us who have been privileged to have an education bear the responsibility to speak the truth” ...that “truth must be told even when it hurts” and that “the truth shall set you free” (Vol. II, P3).

While we are not as highly educated and experienced as him, it is in this spirit of telling the truth and in exercising the right of reply on behalf of some of his former colleagues, peers and bosses, (two of whom were our parents) and most of whom are no longer with us to defend themselves, that we are viewing these works. At this point, we hope that family members, relatives and friends of the author will understand that our sole motive is to defend the honor of our deceased parents and accordingly, is without any ill-will to them.

This being so, we will focus on the following broad issues:

1. **Factual Errors:**

These two volumes are full of historical errors, contradictions, misinterpretations and speculations as well as deliberate omissions. Thus he asserts that:

- He claims (he) was involved in helping finalize the draft OAU Charter and “(that he) **joined the committee**” *ex-officio* in my capacity as Attorney General (Vol. 1, P 184). Not true; he did not join the Committee in any capacity. He may have been one of many other lawyers who were consulted **on certain** issues, but that is a far cry from being a member of the Committee! And he was “present at the creation of the OAU” (Vol. 1, P 94) **not as in an official capacity as a member of the Ethiopian delegation.**
- “represented the EPLF at the United Nations between **1995-2001**” (Vol. 11, P 106). This is an outright lie. Between 1991-93, it was Hagos who was **Head of Mission** to the US, Canada **and the UN**. Between 1993-95, he was the **first** Ambassador of Independent Eritrea to the US, Canada **and the UN**. He was replaced by Andinkiel Kahsai (1995-1997) who was replaced by Haile Menkerios who became the first Representative to the UN (1997-2001) and was followed by Ahmed Tahir Baduri (2001-2005). The author also **seems to have forgotten** that (a) he had abruptly quit official association with the EPLF after the Addis Ababa Conference (1991) and (b) he could not possibly have represented the Eritrean Government after **October 3, 2000** since, in his own words, he had run afoul of the current regime (Vol. 1 P 10).
- He claims to have “**published** a booklet titled” “*Reflections on the Future Political System of Eritrea* (June 1990) where I proposed among other things that the ELF be considered as a future opposition party in a democratic Eritrea (Vol. 11, P 107). Really? If this booklet had been published in 1990 when Eritreans (and Ethiopians) were reading anything and everything on developments in the war, Eritreans and Ethiopians alike would have been talking about it! Yet, nobody we contacted seems to have any recollection of what would have been a best-seller! Which company published? Which libraries have it? Do the ELF and EPLF have it? What was the ELF’s reactions to the recommendations? Was there a book-review? Will any publisher send us copies, if it exists!
- “In earlier centuries, what is today known as **Eritrea used to be known as Midri Bahri** (Vol. I, P 4), oblivious to the fact that the **Afar region** (Dankalia) and the **Eastern region** were never known as Midri Bahri, but thereby providing the reader with the Freudian slip of an Ethiopianized (even Amharanized) mindset; he then continues that Eritrea and Ethiopia have shared a common historical and socio-cultural heritage (Vol. II, P 282). This argument is a dangerous (at least to Eritreans) product of an Ethiopianized mindset. Granted, no sensible Eritrean, from Othman Saleh Sabbe to the modern elite, will deny the existence of “the

shared” heritages of **HIGHLAND** Eritrea with “**PARTS**” of **HIGHLAND** Ethiopia; but this does not mean that the **WHOLE** of Eritrea has shared experiences with the **WHOLE** of Ethiopia. Indeed, there are those who claim that even all “Ethiopians” have not had a “shared experience” until, in some cases, the 19th century. Ask a Somali, Sidama and most Oromos. To adapt an Amharic proverb “Kifu limad ke-liguam yisibal” (i.e. a bad habit pulls stronger than the harness).

- “The Tigre and the Tigrigna are one people, are related people, as can be seen in the **closeness of their two languages** with **Geez** as their common pedigree” (Vol. I, P 212). This is hideous scholarship and an illogic contrived for propaganda purposes. Again, it is dangerous because it is the essence of the Ethiophiles’ historical discourse. By this logic, Italians, the French, the Portuguese and the Spanish are the same people. After all, their languages evolved from Latin.
- “Geez is the Latin of Ethiopia” (Vol. I, P 30). This again is unforgivable because it misleads non-Horn of Africa people. Is Geez the source of Oromofia, Afar, Somal, Kefficho, Sidama and at least more than sixty other ethnic Ethiopian languages?
- The Eritrean State is dominated by the Tigrigna (Vol. II, P 274). This is dead wrong and dangerous political pandering. He should have known, as a self-proclaimed elder of the Eritrean struggle, that the EPLF, and then the PFDJ, with all the human faults they may have, had been very sensitive to religious and ethnic representation and had scrupulously maintained a balanced ethnic and religious membership. (A propos, this is probably true of the ELF) A brief look at the list of the members of the Politburos and the Central Committees of both the EPLF and PFDJ, before and after independence, 1998, will confirm that.
- The determination by African leaders to adopt **Decision 16 (2)** (and it was not a resolution!) on the maintenance of colonial borders was “a paradox of history” (Vol. II, P 139). It was not. African leaders followed as a precedent the decision of Latin American countries which had already adopted the same legal principle in their era of decolonization in the 19th century; and Africa was soon followed by Asian states in the adoption of a similar principle. As a result, it had become a tenet of customary International Law. In fact, it had been hailed by none other than the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as a good application of the principle of *Uti Possidetis*. It has also most recently been regarded as a **binding norm of International Law**. Thus, the Yugoslavia Arbitration Commission relied on it when it declared that the “*internal boundaries*” become international boundaries recognized by International Law. Most Africanists in fact consider them as a sacrosanct source of stability.
- It is not true that the “deadliest wars in Africa were over borders” (Vol. II, P 139). The continent had witnessed-and continues to witness-more numerous, deadlier

and longer **Civil Wars** after independence, notably in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria and recently Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. In some of these, genocide was committed.

- “The years of peaceful resistance-what in Eritrean historiography has been called the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) – created an acute political awareness. A few of the historic leaders like Ibrahim Sultan Ali, Idris Mohammed Adem, and Woldeab Woldemariam had gone out to live as refugees in Egypt” (Vol. II, P 8). Such atrociously careless scholarship is irresponsible and unacceptable. It is almost universally known in Eritrean society (indeed it is part of its cherished folklores) that the ELM (“Mahber Shewate” in Tigrigna and “Haraka” in Arabic) was created by the late Mohammed Saleh Naud and a few of his friends in the Sudan in **1958**. Ibrahim Sultan, and the other icons of Eritrean history which are mentioned above had nothing to do with it. True, they had started peaceful political activity but theirs was between 1940 and 1950. What is dumbfounding, irritating, and unforgivable, is that the author has referred to the matter, more or less accurately, in another section of the book (see Vol. I, P 183).

The books also, additionally, contain numerous careless minor errors which singly may have been ignored as minor irritants but collectively threaten, as a result of their cumulative effect, the credibility and hence the worth of the knowledge and information that is being passed as a legacy to future generations. Its immediate effect is its uselessness to future researchers (students, academics and biography writers) who, by repeating the errors uncritically, may end up geometrically enlarging the scope of its disservice to humanity (Remember the mother of all disinformations: “**Eritrea has always been part of Ethiopia!**”). This is a dereliction of scholarly duty. Thus, it must be emphasized that:

- There was not a **Ministry of Security** in Ethiopia (Vol. II, P XII) until after the creation of the Military Dictatorship. Security was a department in the Ministry of Interior in Imperial times although there was also the **Special Cabinet** in the Emperor’s Office;
- Lorenzo Tazaz has never been a **resident** of Rome (Vol. I, P 111). Lorenzo Tazaz had left for Ethiopia via Aden, Yemen, was sent to Montpellier for education by the Emperor, came back, married Ras Imru’s daughter and worked in Addis Ababa until the invasion and occupation of the country by Italy. He is reputed to have been at the Battle of Mai Chew, then was in exile in London and joined the Emperor’s staff, came back to Ethiopia after its liberation, was briefly the Minister of Foreign Affairs but, as a result of Palace Intrigue, was sent to Moscow as Ambassador where he fell very sick and died in Stockholm while receiving medical treatment. Zerai Deres is more known for his trip to Italy as a member of a Colonial Troupe for a festival in Rome. It was then that he committed his act of “bravery and patriotism” an act unanticipated by the Italians.

- Only one of Ras Imru's companions, Dejazmatch Taye Gulilate, was a member of the Nobility during his house detention in Italy (Vol. I, P 111), the other two, including Yilma Deressa and Hadis Alemayehu were not.
- The PFDJ is not led by **atheists** (Vol. II, P 252) unless one assumes that all secularists are atheists. This does not exclude the existence of atheists in the leadership. It must be remembered that the EPLF had in its ranks Communists and Catholic Priests as well as a bewildering array of confessional and ideological groups fighting and serving in unison.
- The decision to hold a referendum after liberation was not made in response to Jimmy Carter (Vol. II, P232). It had already been a declared policy of the EPLF since the 1987 Congress (in which the author participated) and the information was in the public domain before the Atlanta or Nairobi meetings which were held at the initiative of the Carter Center in 1989.
- Hagos did not claim the rank of representative (thus) "harvesting the fruit of the toil of others" (Vol. I, P 348). Hagos Gebrehiwet had for a long time been the *de jure* and *de facto* representative of the EPLF in North America (US and Canada) and this included overseeing the activities of the "Representative" to the UN. He was appointed to the position after he had served as the Chairman of the National Union of Eritrean Students for a long time. It was, in fact, Hagos who recruited both Tesfai and Dr. Rezene Medhanie to be part of his Washington D.C. office team which also included the inimitable Tsehai Habtemariam and later, Ahmed Haji and Mohammed Suleiman among others. The author was in no way a member of the Washington office until after 1987. Tesfai Ghirmazien had always been the Deputy Head of Mission and this was a fact known to all Eritreans in not only North America but elsewhere, irrespective of the fraudulent information spread by third parties with deliberate malice. The author knows this but decides to deliberately and maliciously make such a statement to mislead future generations. For a reason. It was an open secret within the inner circles of those who were closely associated with the EPLF mission (the **Bet Tsihfet**) that the author resented Hagos who was elected as a member of the EPLF Central Committee (CC) while he had failed to get the required vote, thus making Hagos automatically the most senior person in the region. Additionally, Hagos was now tightly controlling the hitherto unrestrained financial profligacy of the author. Obviously, such irresponsible and fraudulent smear campaigns, have a tendency to boomerang and impinge on the integrity of its perpetrator(s);
- The Jehovah's Witnesses' case was not a simple case of "conscientious objection" (Vol. I, P 255), but of **Citizenship and its consequences**, notwithstanding the fairness or justness of the decisions made, and actions taken by the government;
- The actual name of the iconic hotel in Asmara (Enda Menghetti), which is still emotionally remembered but had irreverently been referred to as Albergo Roma, is **Albergo Italia** although it had been baptized as Keren Hotel by the Derg. Its original name has been restored since liberation (Vol. 1, P 19).

- The discussion on the **Nakfa** by delegations of the two countries was held on 18-20 April 1997, **not 2007**, nine years after the war (Vol. II, P 87); the picture of Mama Zeineb (an Eritrean legend in her own right) and the author (Vol. 11, P 103) could not have been from **2006** for two reasons. The author could not, and would not, have been in Eritrea **after 2000** since he had been a member of the G-15 (but had not even joined the members that dared to go to Asmara and meet with President Isaias in 2000 (because of “pragmatism in the cause of a higher cause”). Secondly, Mama Zeineb may have joined her creator in heaven one year earlier (2005).
- **Mefles** is Tigrigna for wild pig (boar, warthog) but decidedly not a beaver. Incidentally, what is the word for beaver in any Eritrean language, if we actually have them?
- Lastly, without denying the respect and gratitude that is due to them, it is a gross exaggeration to declare that the members of the Constitution Commission of Eritrea (CCE) comprised **the best and brightest Eritreans** with the **requisite** training and experience suited for the job (Vol. 11, P 127).

2. **Omissions:**

The books are further blemished by the absence and, indeed, the willful omission of crucial information which were well-known to the author. Given that the author claims a long association with Ethiopia and Eritrea, it is to be expected that he would provide readers with a much clearer and detailed picture of his personal and political relations with the major protagonists in the history of the two countries. It is not sufficient to refer to political actors only as “kins”, “friends” and “benefactors”. It would have been a meaningful contribution if, at least, the reader were to benefit even from a sketchy profile of some of these personalities, especially since most of them will not be subjects of biographies.

He has also withheld crucial information about his educational background. For example, there is not a single reference in both volumes to the dates and conditions of his enrollment at the University of Perugia in Italy (perhaps his first *alma mater* and the degree he received from it); how he managed to receive two LL.B’s from Hull (Vol. I, P 97) and the University of London (Vol. I, P 97) his preferred *alma mater*, at the same time (1956). Indeed, history and the truth he claims he would die for, demand, and readers would appreciate, **concrete evidence of the LL.B from London.**

Then too, he mentions that he was, along with Professors Mesfin Wolde- Mariam and Seyoum Ghebre-Egziabher, heavily involved in politicizing the Labor Unions of Ethiopia. He actually claims that the government had suspected him (and obviously him alone) of being “...one of the people clandestinely helping the labor movement during the 1960 unrest” (Vol. I, P 91). Yet, he does not mention what he has done to be so singled out. He also is quite about an unhappy relationship which had developed into a life-long animosity with one of these Professors. The reason: During that period of time, the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions (CELU) had received a grant of US

\$2000.00 from the AFL-CIO for capacity building. Immediately thereafter, the author requested for, and received, a loan of US \$200.00 (a big sum in those days and 10% of the grant!) but refused to repay the loan. This created bitterness in the CELU leadership which was strongly and vocally supported by the Professor. The loan, it is reported, has yet to be paid and hostility between the two Professors was to be replayed when the former, as Chairman of the Inquiry Commission (1974-75), seriously and vocally objected to the payment of an unwarranted sum of money (US \$33,000) requested by the author and confirmed by Mengistu Haile-Mariam himself in a taped interview in the early days of his exile. In his most recent memoir, “**Tiglachin**”, Mengistu Haile-Mariam also claims that one of his points of disagreement with General Aman Andom, his predecessor as Chairman of the Derg, was the latter’s insistence that the author be paid US \$2000.00 a month as honorarium during his tenure as a member of the Inquiry Commission. Mengistu’s argument: The author had come of his own free will like the other members of the Commission and that therefore he would not be paid anything. However, he was persuaded by his other colleagues in the Derg that he should compromise on paying him US \$1000.00, which he authorized. Remarkably, Mengistu reveals to his readers that **Bereket actually continued to receive the honorarium for a long time after he had fled the country.**

The author does not give a detailed account of his activities as the Deputy Chairman and the most prominent interrogator (indeed, some of those who listened to the live broadcasts of the sessions have accused him of being more of an inquisitor than interrogator). There are a number of very serious questions made by the public, particularly Eritreans, who accuse him of having been extremely harsh with Eritrean officials in the dock, and by Mengistu Haile-Mariam’s allegations. These must be answered by the author. (See, for example, **Tiglachin**). In particular, the people of Ethiopia would also like to know from him and Prof. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam whether they had in fact advised – indeed urged - the then Vice Chairman Mengistu to extra-judicially execute about sixty of the most senior ministers, senior military officers and government officials as well as some of the nobility of the realm; and Eritreans who had never forgiven him for the way he grilled - actually tormented may be a better word - and mocked Eritrean Ministers and senior officials (“Are you a Woloye?” he asked a well-known Eritrean of whom he was jealous and caused the execution of another.)

The reader is also in the dark about how the author assumed his role of “peacemaker” between the ELF and the EPLF (Vol. I, P 311). Was he requested by one or the other Front? Or did he anoint himself? What were his terms of reference? What were his plan and strategy? And what were the reactions of the leadership of the two Fronts? What were his relationship with the two Fronts? Did he leave the ELF in peace and with good will? Did he join the EPLF based on a thorough reflection and with a clear conscience or in haste and for safety?

An honest and even-handed information of this chapter of Eritrean history would have been a great contribution to posterity. Unfortunately, he is quite mute on the matter and, until Hiruy Tedla Bairu and Isaias Afwerki, among others enlighten us, we are forced to make inferences from mostly oral, secondary sources; and these sources already indicate that his decision was not made because, as he claims, the EPLF was more organized (Vol. I, P12), but because, yet again, he was fleeing from an authority he **wronged** or **enraged**. Indeed, there is concrete evidence that he joined the EPLF **not** by choice but by the dint of prevailing circumstances (Ah, that pragmatism in the interest of a higher cause!).

As a matter of fact, serious issues have been raised about when he **transited from being an Ethiopian to becoming Eritrean** given the fact that (a) there is reason to believe that he was a fervent member of a Harari Association (Edir) in the 60's and 70's while Eritreans were consciously seeking membership in their own Eritrean associational cocoons. (b) It is said he often was heard declaring that he was a **Harari in soul and spirit** and his **Eritreanness was only an historical accident** (perhaps Shimelis Adugna, Assegid Woldamanuel and other Hararis can enlighten us on the matter) (c) he abandoned his World Bank position in 1975 to offer his services to the "Motherland (**Ye Enat Ager Tiri!**, while others were actually fleeing Ethiopia) and (d) he was a close adviser of General Aman who was a staunch Unionist and whose maximalist position on the solution of the Eritrean question was some form of autonomy or, at best, a federation. (Mengistu Haile-Mariam confirms it) (e) he had not declared himself an Eritrean until after he reached the liberated areas (f) in a very recent speech during the launching of these books, he had declared to an Ethiopian audience that (i) he had been an Ethiopian before he became an Eritrean, and (ii) he wished to celebrate the reunification of the two countries before his death.

Furthermore, the author does not refer to his **ten-months detention** in the EPLF's Halewa Sewra (Defense of the Revolution) center and, especially, the reason for his arrest and detention. The fact that he was arrested and detained is attested by none other than the prison guards, other prisoners and officials alike. As for the reasons for his arrest and detention, there are several allegations by former colleagues at the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) that he, and others, were charged with the "misappropriation of funds". It is a matter of record that, in his attempt to destroy Redeazghi Genre-Medhin; the actual prime mover of ERA, he portrayed him as a faithful supporter of the Saleh Sabbe wing while he presented himself as a staunch ally of the wing that was the eventual winner in the rift between the "Foreign Mission" and the "Field" (or the actual fighting) group of the EPLF.

3. **Speculations**

There are also too many unwarranted speculations. Thus, he claims that

- Isaias supported the Islamic Extremists (in Somalia) because Meles was against it acting on the logic "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" (Vol. II, P 177) is not only simplistic

and naïve in the extreme but also not to be expected from someone with wide experience and who had “represented” Eritrea diplomatically and indeed carried a Somali passport during the struggle. The relations between Eritreans and Somalis are much more emotionally deep-seated to be so narrowly and callously viewed and dismissed.

- The relationship between Isaias and Meles with that of Ras WoldeMichael (Eritrea) and Ras Alula (Tigray) may be fanciful but is extremely farcical and farfetched (Vol. I, P 88-89). There is nothing in history to suggest that Wolde-Michael and Alula were, like Isaias and Meles, close friends, and once espoused the same causes.
- Isaias imprisoned Petros Solomon’s wife because he considered him “to be his main rival for leadership and hence a threat to his power” (Vol. 1, P 62) is a non – sequitur. Then too, if what the author clearly indicates in other sections of the memoirs is true, Isaias would have ruthlessly eliminated him as he had earlier eliminated others. It is true that, during the confrontation with the G-15 **rumors** were circulating in Asmara and elsewhere that the urbane but inordinately slick and slippery Petros was being groomed by “the Europeans” as a potential successor while the US favored Haile Woldensae, but these are **strictly rumors**. Maybe, the author had friends in the higher echelons of the US government and maybe Wiki leaks have some information for us!
- There is also a pathetic and desperate speculation about Isaias’ personality on the basis of an opinion on Isaias, by Ethiopia’s Ambassador to the US, the bright Princeton graduate but youthful Samuel Assefa (Vol. II, P 15). It is difficult to understand how a septuagenarian (now octogenarian) who claims to know Isaias very well would depend on a younger, less-experienced person for what, in the final analysis, is only a cheap smear campaign.

However, the worst, deliberate and politically-motivated speculation is related to the demarcation of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border on the basis of the final and binding decision of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Border Commission (EEBC). Professor Bereket writes:

“Now, if the claim that political considerations of not wishing to anger or alienate local Tigrayan Communities and their leaders is true, wouldn’t **ACCEPTANCE** of the offer to **TALK** and **COMPLETE** the demarcation strengthen Isaias’s hand in his feud with Meles. That is to say, **assuming Isaias wants demarcation and eventual normalization of relations between the two countries**. That is an assumption that may be false, particularly if it is the case that Isaias is wedded to a strategy of no-peace-no war.” (Vol. II, P 181-182)

It is evident that the author, by his deliberate prevarication and obfuscation, wishes the reader to conclude that (a) the demarcation of the border is being hindered solely by Isaias’ feud with Meles, (b) Isaias may not want demarcation and (c) Isaias “**may be wedded to a strategy of no-war, no-peace and that Meles is committed to**

demarcation". This is a malevolent falsification of events and policies intended to dupe the casual reader- or even not so-interested professionals-into believing that Eritrea and, particularly, its President are responsible for the non-demarcation of the border. History, however, makes it evidently clear that at first, it was Ethiopia that: a) hailed the decision of the EEBC and urged the international community to ensure "the final and binding" decision without any pre-conditions until it found out the *casus belli*, the village of Badme, was in fact awarded to Eritrea; b) wrote the Secretary General of the UN requesting him to create an "Alternative Mechanism" to settle the issue, c) declared that it accepts the decision "**in principle**" but that Eritrea must be coaxed to engage into a "dialogue" on certain areas of the border which may be unfavorable to "human geography", and d) made indirect attempts, through its allies to have the EEBC change or modify its decisions. Even Meles and his colleagues do not deny this.

During all this time, Eritrea had only two positions; a) it accepted the decision without any pre-conditions or equivocations, although it too had its misgivings and b) it will be ready- indeed **eager-to enter into a dialogue after the implementation of the decision**. It asked-and continues to ask-the UN to acquit itself honorably and responsibly by ensuring the implementation of the decision. At no time has Eritrea refused to consider dialogue as the author declares. At no time did it behave as if it wanted a no-war, no-peace environment. Indeed, most of the world knows that it is Ethiopia which believes that a no-war, no-peace solution was in its strategic interest. And, we believe that Eritrea should never entertain dialogue before demarcation. As the saying goes: "It is the timing, stupid!"

In fact, there is credible evidence that the border war was one of the results of an internal strife within the TPLF leadership. In this respect, the two volumes, entitled **Ye Gazettegnaw Mastawesha** (A journalist's reminiscences), by former TPLF stalwart and journalist, Tesfay Gebreab, contain extremely enlightening information on the issue. Surely, history will judge the authority.

4. Contradictions

The author claims that Ras Imru "was entrusted with the task of receiving petitions (Vol. I, P 110). The office of the "Ombudsman" has never existed in Ethiopia. Indeed, the very concept was popularized even in the West (outside its origin, Sweden and, later, the rest of Scandinavia) probably in the 1960's. True, the Emperor received petitions but the chore of receiving these petitions was the preserve of the Ministry of the Imperial Court (Ghibi Minister). In any case, why would the author call Ras Imru his "benefactor" (and in the process revealing his political mindset) if he were not asking him for a favor through his daughter rather than approaching a government official in charge of petitions (or can we call him, "Lord High Chancellor of Petitions").

5. Falsehoods

Even more serious defects in the memoirs are the author's deliberate perpetration of falsehood. Thus, he claims that: he has been "a former Minister of the Emperor" (Vol. I, P XII), "King's Counsel" (Vol. I, P XV), "with the arm of the law at my disposal, as the Attorney General" (Vol. I, P XIII), participated in the creation of the OAU (Vol. I, P184-87). These are patent and immoral falsehoods designed to impress, by duping and misleading the unformed among Ethiopians and Eritreans as well as innocents abroad—even educated-foreigners who have had no opportunity to be informed about Ethiopia. How many American college graduates would not automatically think that an Attorney General was not the Head of the Department (Ministry) of Justice? Thus, one such "educated" man, a College Professor, writes in a review of the first volume as follows:

"In a relatively short period Selassie succeeded in **vertical penetration of the citadels of power**; he was at the **center of Ethiopian politics** both during the imperial rule and in the early part of the Military regime. He **met with prominent African leaders** too, ... [and] He also had encounters with freedom fighters and **theorists** such as Frantz Fanon."

"Selassie **rose and fell** in the royal politics of Ethiopia, as symbolized in his ascendancy to the position of **Attorney General** and his **relegation** later to the **Mayoralty of the provincial town of Harar**." (See, for example, the review of the first volume of the memoirs by Professor Seifudein Adem of The State University of New York at Buffalo, in **African Studies Review** (2001), Vol. 54, Issue I, P 213).

However, it is certain that he is doubtful of the credibility of the author since he diplomatically protects himself as follows:

"In writing a memoir, an author sometimes fall (sic) **victim to the temptation of stretching the truth, exaggerating one's role in historical events, or trying to anticipate or preempt criticism from imagined skeptical readers**." (Ibid)

Thus it is transparent that all his claims are patently untrue. At no time, let alone on 10 September 1967, was he a Minister and King's (it would, in any case, have been Emperor's) Counsel or assumed any of the positions he claims to have been. The late Getachew Kibret, then the Legal Advisor of the Foreign Ministry was the Legal Advisor of the OAU Ethiopian delegation to the four day conference of the OAU which adopted, with minor changes, the Ethiopian draft of the Charter of the new organization.

In any case, he unwittingly gives himself away, when he declares that he "was sitting in the gallery next to a British **journalist**", (Vol. I, P 187). Advisers sit behind their respective delegations, diplomats and senior government officials sit in the middle of the

official section of the upper level while the public, including journalists and representatives of NGO's sit on the right and left side of the officials.

Yes, it is true that he was the Attorney General but, in official Ethiopian administrative usage, the Attorney General is only a bureau head and, thus, only a high-level **civil servant** and not, unlike the US Attorney General, the head of a Ministry (i.e. an American Department) of Justice. It is obvious the author was playing fast and loose with words and equally obvious that he had duped some trusting souls.

He actually plays a similar deceptive game when he uses the sub-title: "Associate Justice of the Supreme Court" in writing about his appointment to the Federal Supreme Court. This is meant to subtly intimate that the Court was akin to the US Supreme Court. The former was a by-product of the Eritrean-Ethiopian Federation which was created by the UN in 1952. Its sole purpose was to review, as pointed out by the author himself, cases **referred to it by the Federal High Court** Sitting in Asmara, the Eritrean capital. **Its role was limited essentially to finance and interstate commerce.** More importantly, it was rendered impotent since the Emperor's Representative to Eritrea, his son-in-law Ras Andargachew Messai, personally declared to the Eritrean Parliament that there would not be any distinction between internal and external (federal) matters, almost immediately after he assumed his office. By 1962, the Federation was unilaterally annulled by the Emperor. It is possible that he had not sat on any case between his appointment in 1959 and the dissolution of the Federation in 1962.

Also, while he had, as he claims, become a member of the EPLF at the end of 1975 and **actively** participated in the liberation struggle, he had not participated in the **armed** struggle as he often portrayed himself. His claim that he was a lawyer dedicated to "the rule of law and human rights" is not supported by any written evidence or by witnesses. His claim that "all my adult life, **I have been involved in one struggle after another with not much time left for my family** (Vol. II, P 21) is also not supported by past or present evidence. The author will do himself and his readers a favor if he can produce any such evidence- and that is a challenge.

It is assumed that any struggle espouses a cause or causes. No such cause or open commitment to a cause (like the Vaclav Havels, Aung San Suv Kyis, the Kenyattas and of the Nkrumahs) or sacrifices made for these causes is evident in the author's life. His life as a student does not show any more trials and tribulations in excess of those faced by almost all of the Ethiopian/Eritrean students of his generation (1948-54). Indeed, some suffered more by severing ties with the Imperial Regime. There may have been youthful flirtations with this or that ideology, and admiration of this or that leader, but not real commitment to any political creed or genuine membership of any political organization, no writings, lectures or demonstrations as most African students of his generation in Britain and France had done, is in evidence. His life from 1954-71 is nothing out of the

ordinary for the times. The only exception was his involvement with the CELU and that was a far cry from being revolutionary. Indeed, many of his generation, and later ones, have suffered similar or more injustice and discrimination than him not only because of what principles they had espoused but because of what their parents had expressed or done. Good examples are the highly principled Getachew Medhane who suffered for his principles as he spent most of his working life in small positions in Debre Markos, Dessie etc. and the inimitable Yidnekachew Tessema who suffered because he was his father's son (and his father suffered for being loyal to Lij Eyassu, Menelik's heir apparent, who was overthrown before he assumed the throne by Haile Selassie and his cohorts) and had to survive-and achieve-by his wits. The author's life at the World Bank and at Howard University 1976-94 and now at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill cannot be considered "hardship posts" in which "sacrifices" had to be made.

As for his much vaunted claims of sacrifices during the Eritrean struggle, he cannot be unaware of the **real "sacrifices"** made by:

- The young college graduates from the finest universities, graduates with family and good jobs, as well as those enrolled in universities, who abandoned family, potential good jobs and their education to join the armed struggle with both the ELF and the EPLF;
- The young high school and college students who abandoned school to join the struggle;
- The young men and women, married and with children, who abandoned their university teaching and other professional positions to serve in the external missions for almost nothing (and, in some cases, for nothing) in the US, Canada, the Middle East and Europe;
- Scores of men and women of all ages and professional positions in the Ethiopian government (i.e. in the belly of the beast), international and regional organizations, NGO's and businesses in Addis Ababa, Asmara and elsewhere in Ethiopia at a very great risk to their lives (and especially those who were executed, imprisoned, tortured and maimed);
- Members of the Eritrean Communities in the Diaspora (young and old, man and woman) who sacrificed much of their time and the interests of their families, to contribute to the struggle by organizing numerous events and collecting money.

In the interest of the truth (the bitter truth) and for the record, it must be mentioned that the author had a full-time teaching job at Howard during the time (1975-91) of his membership in the EPLF, visited New York not more than three or four times per year during this time (usually during vacation times at the University) and at which time he collected per diem from the EPLF Mission in Washington D.C. Money earned from the above mentioned collections covered the cost of all of his train or plane tickets for his travels (while others funded themselves and paid for

their journeys) in Europe and elsewhere for official EPLF business. It is a matter of record that he **actually suspended** the financial contribution he was making to the Cause like any other member of the EPLF after he became the EPLF “Representative to the UN” in 1987. **In short, while everyone else was contributing to the cause, he was taking from the cause.**

While it is true that he effectively organized, and participated, in numerous academic conferences, notably the African Studies Association, he was only one of numerous other academics and professionals who actively but silently championed and promoted the cause of the national struggle. Thus, for example, Professor Asmerom Legesse not only chaired the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) in the US but also effectively participated in all these meetings. Yet, he and others have not sought recognition - let alone financial compensation – for what they considered was their national duty. They recognized that their **minor** “sacrifice”, compared to what was going on in the “field” (the war zone), in all their ramifications (family, financial, personal security) were an integral part of any national struggle and that it was their national and revolutionary duty and an honor-to make sacrifices.

What makes them even more unique is that the overwhelming majority scrupulously adhered to, and were guided by, the cultural tenets of the Eritrean Struggle, as inspired by both the ELF and EPLF, which **demand self-abnegation, self-denial and self-effacement** and inculcated in them the principle that **life was to be lived for the people and to be given to the nation.**

- When referring to **Workineh Gebeyehu**, “the Intelligence Chief and trusted member of the **Emperor’s Private Cabinet**”, he recognizes the institution as a legitimate, publicly recognized agency of government. He had even visited the office. Yet, in another context he refers to it as the “**netherworld** of the Emperor’s Private Cabinet.” This was not a constitutionally – sanctioned **Cabinet of Ministers**; it was an extra – constitutional **entity** created to help the Emperor monitor the government. **Nobody knew what the appointees of the Emperor’s Private Cabinet did. Thus, I had no idea what Teshome did in that netherworld.** (Vol. I, P 208)
- “Netherworld?” But, this was one of the institutions that he had recognized when he visited during Workineh’s time! It was not a hidden agency. Everybody in Addis Ababa knew of its existence – especially after the failure of the 1960 coup d’état.
- “It was an extra – constitutional entity”? The Emperor’s Private Cabinet was created by the Emperor on the basis of Article 27 of the Revised Constitution of Ethiopia (1955) which reads as follows:

“The Emperor determines the organization, powers and duties of all Ministries, **executive departments** and the administration of the government and appoints, promotes, transfers, suspends and dismisses the officials of the same.”

It cannot be any clearer! And, it is not that the author does not know, as a constitutional lawyer!

- “Nobody knows what the appointees do”? The Private Cabinet had at least six departments headed by highly experienced and/or educated Advisors/Counselors. The departments covered:
 - ❖ **Security**: headed by Colonel Workineh and others before and after him;
 - ❖ **Military**: General Wolde-Selassie Bereka and others before and after him;
 - ❖ **Political and Foreign Affairs**: Dr. Minasse Haile and others before and after him;
 - ❖ **Press**: Mebea-Selassie Alemu; and others before him;
 - ❖ **Religious Affair**: Aba Habtemariam Workineh;
 - ❖ **His Imperial Majesty’s Private Secretary**: Yohannes Kidane-Mariam and others before him;
 - ❖ **Legal**: Teshome Haile-Mariam and others before and after him.

This was no “netherworld”; and they were no shadowy characters and the author knows it! But, he has a good reason for being in **denial**. Yes, the head of the Legal department was the **real “King’s Counsel”** and recognizing his department’s existence and what he was doing would wreck his **bald claim to the title**, which not only starts as a title of the prologue to the book but is also repeated at any given opportunity in the rest of the two volumes.

- The author repeatedly asserts that he was fully aware of President Isaias’ “**dictatorial tendencies**” (Vol. I, P 107), that he had indications that “...Isaias was not fully **comfortable** with (my) ... **explicit advocacy of the rule of law and democratic government** with a multi-party system” (Vol. II, P 107). This was **as early as 1990**. Yet, he would like readers to accept that he and others (“*Dequi Gherhi Leba*”) were naïve enough to be the victims of an “**immaculate deception**” (Vol. II, P 118) as late as **1998**. That includes **the period during which the Constitution** was drafted by a Commission chaired by him. If so, why would he accept an appointment, **in 1994**, by a President who, as far as he was concerned **already had** “dictatorial tendencies” (Vol. II, P 107); and why did he not resign as soon as he was aware that these tendencies had **manifested themselves as early as 1995?**
- It is evident, from his own writing that he never took those issues as serious, and that he had never had second thoughts about the political and moral problems that he will have to confront if and when he accepts the Chairmanship of the Commission. Yet the only issues he discussed with the President when he accepted the appointment were his **material welfare** and interests (his detractors are actually certain that he actually campaigned for the position); his discussions, in fact, focused on financial compensation and job security. He writes, “When I raised the **question regarding my family** (after the preliminary banalities), he went on to say that there should be no problem in finding **financial assistance**”. Some revolutionary; some commitment to a cause! (Vol. II, P 107-108). The final agreement consisted of:
 - ❖ Acceptance by the Government of Eritrea of the author’s insistence that he pursue his **full-time** teaching job at University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) with full pay;

- ❖ Only occasional visits to Eritrea to Chair the Commission, meaning that the Drafting Committee would meet at his convenience;
- ❖ Receiving the full amount of the sum allocated in the UN project budget for the Chairman;
- ❖ Payment of a US \$80,000 to cover the whole amount of the mortgage of his house in the US;
- ❖ A fully-furnished house with appropriate staff in Asmara **for free**;
- ❖ A car with a chauffeur and free gas;

If this is sacrifice and hardship, then may it visit all Eritreans **at all times!**

There is absolutely no mention of a discussion of the possible contents of the Constitution and the Constitution-making process. There was no discussion of the contents of a “*booklet titled Reflections on the Future Political System of Eritrea*” written by him in 1990 which, he claims, “extremely upset” President Isaias (Vol. II, P 107). Why? because it would not be in the interest of Pragmatism for a higher cause.

After the severance of his relations with the EPLF government, in favor of membership of a group that he was certain would be the new leaders of the country, he was waxing eloquent about good governance, human rights and multi-partyism and waxing indignant about the violations of principles (Vol. II, P 115-117).

Yet, during the period of the writing of the Constitution (1994-1998), he kept silent in spite of the repeated signs that, in his own words, “were there for us to be distrustful” (Vol. II, P 118), including the pamphlet issued on June 10, 1995 titled “Clarifications of our views on the Constitution” which, *inter-alia*, referred to “Guided Democracy” (Vol. II, P 118) and which he now damns as “immaculate deception” (Vol. II, P 119). He rationalizes:

“In trusting a man who was and is not worthy of our trust, what we were doing – those of us who **by then had an inkling that he could be deceptive** – in that since he had the nation by the throat, **we had no choice but to go along ... It was pragmatism adopted for a higher cause** (Vol. II, P 118).

The last sentence – and its variations-are the *leit-motif* that run throughout the memoirs; and it reveals the unsavory belief/value system of the author and his unrelenting but futile urge to achieve fame and wealth **by all means possible**. **In the end, this egocentrism has been the curse that destroys him.**

6. **Fantasies:**

It is also apparent that the author suffers from some obsessive fantasies which impel him to fabricate “historical events”, scenarios and conversations with the purpose (urge) of promoting, explaining or justifying his self-esteem, ambitions and interests. In the

process, however, he ends up forgetting who he really is, the socio-political environment of the times in which he was living, the personalities with whom he was dealing and the inevitable bad consequences he may suffer. Some of these fantasies are too serious to be ignored or dismissed because they are misrepresentations of the political cultures of their respective times.

Thus, he claims that:

- (a) “He (i.e. His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I) and I had a **complex and strained relationship**” (Vol. I, P IV), thus, if not inferring equality of status, at least a status level to compare himself with the Emperor.
- (b) “He had **mixed feelings about me**” (Vol. I, P XV),
- (c) “The **battle of wills** (between the Author and Emperor) started after my graduation” (Vol. I, P XV) and
- (d) The Emperor and I faced each other, “**eye-ball to eye-ball**”, (Vol. I, P XVI) “**man to man**” (Vol. I, P XVI)

He also claims that on 10 September 1967, he was visited by a police officer and two armed plainclothesmen who took him in a police van to the office in the Ministry of Security (N.B. there was no such Ministry in 1967), unceremoniously pushed into the office of the Minister although he claims he was “a former (sic) Minister of the Emperor, how he feared for his life even as the “Minister” informed him that he “had” been summoned to appear before the Emperor and, on arriving in the palace, he was filled with apprehension, although he had gone in and out “of this center of power and intrigue without any sense of danger. He faces him alone, eye-ball to eye-ball, man to man, “And then ... the reader is left in suspension from **PXVI to P219 only to find out that he had been transferred to Harar.**

At this juncture, three significant points must be raised, in fairness to the Imperial system and history, and in order to give the reader, particularly the foreign reader, a better appreciation of the Imperial appointment and demotion (i.e. the famous *Shum-Shir*) system and its process.

None of the prospective appointees and demotes are unceremoniously hauled into a police van and taken to any destinations before they proceed to the Imperial Palace, as sensationally as the author depicts. This includes even **high-level civil servants**. There was no need for that. When any subject of the Emperor, including dignitaries and nobilities in far provinces, are summoned to, and instructed to be at, the Palace at a designated date and time, they make sure they do that to the exclusion of everything else. **It is when they do not** that police vans-and troops-are needed.

Secondly, no person, let alone a civil servant, would be allowed to be that near to the Emperor, including even his own daughter and his cousin and his closest friend to the end, Ras Imru. They all stood by his side, facing the rest. Other selected dignitaries will stand about five to ten meters away to his left and right in accordance with their protocol precedence. This is in the inner chambers. Others wait in the center chamber and, as the author accurately describes, some may

wait for four, five even six hours-and then may go home without seeing the Emperor. He was in this group. Any violation of these strict arrangements will be met with great disapprobation and tongue-lashing by palace courtiers.

Shum-Shirs are highly dignified, solemn and cultured procedures. Usually, but not always, appointments are made in groups. The appointees-and demotees-present themselves in the Palace ground **by themselves** and are then courteously escorted to the Emperor as a group. Then, “the appointees” (and demotees because technically they too are being “appointed” if only downwards rather than upwards or sideways) are presented to the Emperor by the Minister of Pen who begins with “by the gracious approval and consent of His Imperial Majesty” and then reads the names and new positions of the persons. Those appointed, including those very senior ministers and many officers who have been appointed to some hideous provincial positions or an ambassadorial positions in some god-forsaken country, the effete Crown Council or even worse the “Senate” of the Imperial Government (popularly known as the garage), kiss the ground before the Emperor, shower him with praise, wish him long age, and shower him with other words of gratitude, and loyalty. It is on rare occasions (and, even here, there may be no confirmation on this fact) that a very high dignitary or official is summoned alone for an appointment. The most historic appointment of such a nature in modern times was that of Tsehafe Tazaz Wolde-Ghiorgis Wolde-Yohannes, perhaps the most important and most powerful official in the realm at that time, who was appointed “Governor General” of Arussi, the smallest Governorate-General of Ethiopia at that time. Ironically, he was the Minister of Pen. He came to the Palace on his own (well, maybe because his office was in the Palace). Upon his appointment, he went through the ritual of kissing the ground and profusely expressing his gratitude with great dignity.

Only **political appointees** received their appointments directly from the Emperor. The rest received their letters of appointments from the Minister of Pen (in earlier times) and the Prime Minister, after about 1960, although the appointments were made in the name of the Emperor.

A propos, the Attorney General, Mayors of even important town and cities like Harar and Asmara and Legal Advisors of even important Governorates-General such as Harar, Begemder and “Eritrea” were civil servants at the highest level-i.e. Assistant Minister. Finally, the political appointments included only Vice-Ministers, Ministers of State, Ministers as well as, Governors-General and Deputy Governors-General of Important Governorates-General.

The author was none of the above until he was appointed **Vice-Minister** of Interior (equivalent of Assistant Secretary General in the US). His transfer to Harar was lateral and just about any adult in Ethiopia who had a minimal knowledge of the operations of the Imperial Ethiopian government would laugh at the melodramatic (or pseudo-dramatic) rendition of the manner of his “appointment”.

Surely, Ethiopians from those times, and even foreigners who had lived in Ethiopia in those times, could not but be seized by disbelief and dismay, even as they laugh at the effrontery of such intellectual charlatanism and political rubbish. Any person aware of the pomp, ceremony and protocol of the imperial regime knows that during official business hours, not many dignitaries of the realm, and definitely no higher-level civil servant, would be allowed to see him alone. This, of course, does not include his personal aides and retainers.

During those business sessions none are allowed to stand-or sit-beside him, let alone be near enough to engage the Emperor in a “staring match”. The closest, including his cousin and, to the end, his closest and faithful friend, Ras Imru, would stand-or-sit-at least about five meters away. Still others wait in the outer chamber while the last, in which the author, as a minor official would be included, outside the building until they are summoned. Most, especially the older generation always bow their heads at all times in veneration of the “Sun Emperor” (Tsehaytu Negus!). No such *lese majeste*, i.e. challenging the Emperor “eye ball to eye ball, man to man”, goes unpunished. Many have been **flogged** for lesser offenses. This is what happened in feudal Ethiopian.

Now, the author tells us that he was alone with the Emperor and testing his will (who blinked first), “eye ball to eye ball and man to man” (And we ask in disbelief “Wey gud, keman ghar tefatetin alu?” In Amharic; and in Tigrigna “Intai tibil? Tefatitna! Mis men?” Translation: “eye ball to eye ball with the Emperor; you don’t say!” We must conclude that this has to be dismissed as the aberrations of a pathologically narcissistic subaltern who had ideas way above his station! In any case, it may, with some luck, play in Peoria (IL) but not in Arada (Addis Ababa) or Shouq (Asmara).

- “One theory popular among my friends was that I had been shadowed **by the Emperor’s secret agents**... who possibly included the educational liaison officer” (Vol. I, P 104). Really? **The Emperor’s** (and not even the governments! Personal agents?) Did he not inform the reader that it was the Vice-Minister of Education who had been the culprit who caused his involuntary repatriation (see, for example, Vol. I, P 109) in which he claims “... the Vice-Minister who was **never favorable to Tigrigna-speaking people in general and Eritreans in particular** was thus provided a golden opportunity” and then declares “If I ever had any doubts about **Shoan Perfidy**, this was to put such doubts to rest.” (Vol. I, P 109)
- “There came another surprise, one that shook Harar **like an earthquake!** (His passing the **secondary school** entrance examination) FIVE of us passed. **I topped the list**... The second shock was that **I passed...the exam from the fifth grade and all those who took it from the sixth grade had failed** (Vol. I, P 57). An earthquake! “Tebale Tebale-Ende”!! Addis Ababans would sing about such hallucinations!!

Finally, his dramatization of an incident in Asmara, when he and three others who were helping him to escape from Asmara were stopped by a police dragnet, merits special

mention if only because it gives the reader an insight into the real person and the person portrayed by him, and the farcical extent (to which) the author is willing to go to extol his talents and to glorify himself at the expense of others:

He claims that, after General Aman's death, "During the day I carried a loaded gun even when I went to the office of the Commission, where I sat near the window of my office overlooking the entrance of the five-story building. I have decided that if the worst came to the worst, and they (i.e., the security) came to get me, I would take them with me saving the last bullet for myself." (Vol. I, P 279)

And while he was hiding in Gebrehiwet Aregai's office (the lawyer's last name is not preceded by "Wolde") he had, he says "...a .38 special with fifty bullets, Aman's gift, and Chanyalews "pineapple" hand grenade, given to me when I confided (sic) him that I was planning to leave town. In those days of madness, I said that if **they came to get me, I would take them with me. Thus, the gun and the hand grenade.**" (Vol. I, P 279)

Ah, but this was in Addis Ababa and the danger was only imagined as a **possibility** or even **probability**. All this vanished at a critical time of reckoning when, in Asmara, on his way back to his friend's house for the night, he and those who were assigned to help him escape to the liberated zone, were stopped by an army unit patrolling the streets. While his fear in Addis Ababa was hypothetical, the one in Asmara was real – very real; and so, he tells the reader that his "heart leapt to (sic) my mouth", "his worst fears were being realized;" and that he felt as though he was in "a dream when you desperately want to run but your legs won't move."

Yet, he had enough wits and the instinct "to get rid of the .38 special which...he had been carrying with (him) all the way from Addis Ababa" (Vol. I, P 304) by "...**slipping it underneath Haregu's (one of the ELF agents) seat.**" (Vol. I, P 304)

Ah, but this is Asmara, the danger was **real** and so no declarations of brave intentions would be useful. If you can stay alive by incriminating those who had come to help you, so be it! After all, this is the teaching of pragmatism in the interest of a higher cause. His life is more important than theirs; and what nonsense is this talk of death!

- "God knows that there are a few type who dearly wish me a hasty departure especially among the crowd in Asmara and their **mindless agents** in the diaspora" (Vol. II, P 207) (Question: Who would want to when he keeps destroying **himself at any given opportunity?**);
- "A document found on the dead body of an Ethiopian soldier had referred to me as a leader of the ELF" (Vol. I, P 146) [and] "I was surprised to find my name mentioned as a leader of Jebha" (Vol. I, P 314). The statistical chance of its happening is not taken into account, obviously;
- "I assumed that he (the Governor-general of Harar) **needed my name and experience** to back up whatever decisions he made, **which assumption proved well-founded**" (Vol. I,

P 228) Enda Aboy Fekadu, Baelom Yenaadu! Goes a Tigrigna proverb (approx. English translation; These are those that heap praise on their own selves!);

- “It is possible that it was then that Mengistu Haile-Mariam...**issued a price** on my head” [and]...”**there was a plot**...to have me invited to a wedding in *Shima Negus La’Elai* and poison me there” (Vol. I, P 309); Who were the plotters? The ELF, EPLF or the Dergue....? Quite Florentine, though!
- “When I became associated with Mahber Shewate in Addis Ababa in the early **1960’s**, I had **no knowledge of this** fact (i.e., that it was created in the Sudan!); only that the **underground movement aimed at organizing Eritreans in order to protect their rights that were being steadily eroded by Ethiopian government.**” (Vol. I, P 182) Soon, however, he graduates himself to membership to “a secret underground movement,” and then considers himself “an underground organizer” (Vol. I, P 183)... and “a high government official...**involved** in the **activities** that were against the law...” (Vol. I, P 183), “a **revolutionary** set out to right some wrong” (Vol. I, P 183). Several former ELM members flatly have declared that **this statement was a lie** and that, on the contrary he was being avoided by their groups since he was considered an anti-Eritrean member of the government.
- Isaias had reservations about me, questioned my loyalty...perhaps even suspected that I had ambitions that might clash with his own (Vol. II, P 106)...and **that I was a contestant to his power** (Vol. II, P 186). The author surely needs a reality check. Maybe his own sense of self-importance makes him think so but nobody in **the EPLF** (and not many in Eritrean society at large) would take this absurdity seriously. It is a matter of public record that in the last pre-independence congress of the EPLF (1987) he had been nominated for membership in the Central Committee (CC). He failed to get enough votes. Then, he was nominated for alternate membership. The author withdrew his candidacy only after he realized that he was, by and large, an unknown quantity in the Field and would again not get the necessary votes. Surely, this demonstrates that (a) he was not in high esteem of the rank and file of the EPLF and (b) Isaias could not have felt threatened by him if he had allowed his nomination twice. In any case, has not the author already declared that Isaias dealt with any real or perceived threat ruthlessly? (See, for example, the section on Petros Solomon who became Isaias’ “target and a man to watch” (Vol. II, P 195)). By the way, Hagos was elected CC member at the same congress; and thereby hangs a tale!
- “I never could fit it in the Royal circle even **when they wanted me** because I was also by conviction a **Social Democrat** and therefore **opposed in principle to royalty** (Vol. I, P 105) and “my relations to the royal family was **always a rocky one**” (Vol. I, P 105). Let us avail ourselves of one popular Italian-Eritrean saying “Addio Carta, Geografia”, and adapt it to our present concern “Addio Historia, Politica”. Since when have Social Democrats been anti-monarchy? This won’t play in London, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo and a host of other European cities which have hosted monarchy and social

democracy together. **A rocky relationship?** This is laughable. The Ethiopian Royalty (and nobility, for that matter) would react to such effrontery (*difret* in Tigrigna and Amharic) by asking “yeman lij hono?” (in Amharic) and “who does this plebeian think he is?” (in English) and we say “Sit Engidih!” (in Amharic) (English equivalent would be: Sure, we believe ya!) to an unbelievably bald lie.

That aside, a casual reading of either volume will reveal a consuming desire and ambition to be associated with “palace people” at any cost and, at this point, it would be appropriate to refer to the tantalizing titles of the two volumes.

The title of the first is “**The Crown and the Pen**” and it thus promises to describe an epic struggle between the physical force of a government and the intellect of a rebel; a struggle between a rebel whose sole weapon was the pen and an imperial government which commanded the supreme legal, political, and social (including religious) authority of the realm. Yet, while the Crown’s flexing of its muscles at will was writ large and exercised in grandeur, there was absolutely no evidence of an active pen writing in defiance. This pen must have had no ink since there were no tracts, manifestos, leaflets, pamphlets, speeches. In fact, the author had not written anything openly or in clandestine until after he joined the EPLF in 1975.

The sub-titles refer to “a rebel”. By definition, a rebel is a person who, because of his ideological beliefs, openly opposes and defies the social, cultural and political values of the governing elite of any state at a given time of its history. He could be a novelist, journalist, cartoonist and an economic/political thinker. More often than not, he encourages and leads openly, or in secret, the people to rise from within the country against the government of the day. The author has not done any of these until after 1975. On the other hand, there is ample evidence that he actually espoused, and guided himself by, the values, norms, principles and procedures of the existing establishment even when circumstances had forced him to confront the government of the day. Indeed, by his own accounts, he rejects the advice of an Eritrean activist of the day, Tseggai Eyassu, whom he had known since his secondary school days at the Wingate, to sever his ties with the establishment instead of begging it for favors (Vol. I, P 106). Why? In his own words “I was **torn between two positions**: one counsel of the wise, coming from the Ambassador who knew **Ethiopian society and politics**; the other coming from an Eritrean **nationalist** who thought that any dealing with the members of the system was compromising one’s principle.” He was not ready to sacrifice for the struggle and decides to compromise his principles if he had any. Thus, Tseggai Eyassu, “the Eritrean nationalist bridled with anger as soon as I broached the subject of meeting the Princess. How could you solicit the services of these exploiters of our people” and advised him that “...he would be better off without their help...”. Now, this is a committed revolutionary! Yet he rejected it (Vol. I, P 106). His reaction was to rationalize “although I respected Tseggai, I **did not entirely agree with him**. I knew that some of the government officials (like Ambassador Abebe Retta) were decent and fair-minded, (and) it was unfair to generalize and condemn a whole people.” He completely **ignores** the folly of mixing up a **political system** with some **individuals working** in the system. He also seems to have

forgotten that he had already condemned Shoan perfidy (Vol. I, P 109) because of the discriminatory acts of one Shoan.

He also temporarily forgets that Ato Abebe (the Ambassador) was of course a Tigrean and one who defended Tigreans! An anecdotal illustration becomes instructional. One day, the Emperor summons Ato Abebe, the father of one of his grandchildren, and asks him not alone, as in the case of the author's claims, but in full view of the Imperial notables and dignitaries: "Is it true you have too many Tigres in your Ministry?" Ato Abebe deadpanned: "Your Majesty, are not your Tigrean subjects Ethiopians?" Now that is a man of principle!

Then too, he admits that "without her daughter, Seble's intervention, I could not have come **near the gate** of her residence, let alone gain access to her inner chambers (Vol. I, P 114). He continues: "And so I arrived at the Office of Her Royal Highness, Princess Tenagnework, the Emperor's eldest daughter, and **consort** to His Excellency Andargatchew Messai, the Emperor's Representative to Eritrea" (Readers are expected to be awed and to envy Bereket's luck!). Her office was located inside her residence. **How does one feel at the door of the most powerful woman in Eritrea, and probably of the whole of Ethiopia**, at the time? **I don't know how others might feel, but I felt elated...**! (Vol. I, P 114). Some rebel!

Once he passes the door and is presented, he behaves as follows:

"She (i.e. the Princess) **motioned** me to sit down on a **smaller** sofa in front of her. **That shocked me beyond words** for I had heard that **one does not sit with royalty unless one is of royalty** and I knew I had not an iota of blue blood in my veins. Instead of doing as she asked, **I stood.**" "... (she then) told me **firmly** to sit down". **"I sat down"**. Does this craven behavior compare with the brave and defiant words of the author? Some Social Democrat, some dashing revolutionary rebel! Some anti-monarchist!

The title of the second volume refers to Eritrea as a "wounded nation". This is true. The new country had once again gone to war and suffered; it was betrayed by several states, and other external actors and individuals as well as by some of its own political elite, in both the ruling party and the opposition groups. Some of the educated elite, especially in the diaspora, excluding most of the G-15, but including some former freedom fighters, may have been responsible for some minor damages. This, however, is not in the purview of this review.

One the other hand, one individual stands out because of one of the greatest historic betrayals of trust of the Eritrean people and for critically wounding the nation by a horrible stab in the back. That person will have to be responsible before God, history and the Eritrean people. This man is the author of the memoirs and the day of judgment will not be far. It is because we do not have complete evidence that we desist from exposing the whole story of treachery. This is the story:

- The author was appointed as the Chairman of the Constitution Commission of Eritrea (CCE) by the President of the new State of Eritrea. The Proclamation that created the

CCE provides that it will be an independent body answerable only to the Constituent Assembly to which it was responsible. The chairman had repeatedly vowed, and the other members of the Executive (Drafting) Committee of the Commission were equally firm in their conviction, that the “autonomy and legitimacy of the Committee would be not, in any way, be compromised by anybody, that the final document would be “neutral...open-ended in political ideological terms” and that it would not be “too closely identified with the transient fortunes of a particular party or pressure group, and rise and fall with them” (Vol. II, P 112-113), even as they correctly acknowledged that the Eritrean government being the prime mover of the idea of Constitutionalism and a principal stake-holder in the constitution-making process, must be frequently consulted.

- Then too, the author claims that “The Draft came out of the discussions of the Executive Committee and was submitted for its approval of the entire Commission and reflected the outcomes of the previous two years debate and the thinking of the members of the commission” (Vol. II, P 113). This is true.

However, while other members of the Executive Committee maintained the highest level of moral and professional integrity that was expected of them, the Chairman had, unbeknownst to them, fatally compromised their autonomy and the legitimacy of the Commission and may have irreparably damaged the future of the constitution. The details of the perfidy and betrayal of the Chairman who may have succumbed to the influence of unauthorized third parties will surely come out sooner than later. However, he is invited to defend himself before history.

Indeed, it is evident that, even as late as October 26, 2012, he had succumbed to the exigencies of “Pragmatism in the interest of a higher cause” and was easily enticed to agree “in principle to jointly rewrite Eritrea’s constitutional framework...” with a certain Professor Joseph Magnet of the University of Ottawa’s Law School (Press Release, RSDO Foreign Mission, Oct. 26, 2012). Although he had until then **ad nauseum, ad infinitum** declared the need to defend the integrity and quality of the Eritrean Constitution.

It must be noted that he had hitherto argued that the Eritrean Constitution:

- “is generally regarded as belonging to the people (Vol II, P 125) or, as it appears in the G-15 Manifesto (a document he claims to have contributed to its writing, although perhaps not as a “Principal Author”) was the most sacred document of the Nation (ibid);
- “was a document drafted with wide popular consultation of the people and ratified by their elected representatives” (ibid)
- Cannot be suspended or **otherwise tampered with** according to the whims and caprices (Vol II, P 126) of “a minority of opposition groups (who) chose not to participate, despite their right to do so (ibid) or even a President. (ibid).

Yet, the author thinks that he can enter into an agreement with a professor **who is not even Eritrean to rewrite** the constitution at the behest of a **minority** group that **claims** to represent

the Afar of Eritrea (i.e. The Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization), if only because he has been impelled by his fantasies to declare himself the **Father of the Eritrean Constitution** and had some credulous foreign souls to believe him. One question though: Does he have the right to **bastardize** it at **his whims and caprice**?

There is reliable information received from persons of high integrity and other well “connected” individuals that, although they were still unaware of the perfidy of their Chairman, some members of the Executive Committee had protested about the unprofessional language and substance of some parts of the text. Three examples are usually given. The first, Article 7(4) of the draft had provided for a detainee to be kept in custody of the police - or any other relevant authority-for one month-a **whole month** – without being taken to a court of law. There was a lengthy, heated and rancorous argument between the Chairman, who was defending the text and some members who denounced it in very clear terms, as being the very antithesis of democratic principles and insisted that nobody shall be denied the right **to appear before a court of law within twenty-four hours** as they had agreed in their discussions. It is said that, after a furor which almost turned into a rebellion, the Chairman relented and a compromise of a **forty-eight hours** limit was adopted with a **heavy** collective heart on the part of the objectors who hoped that the whole Commission would reverse it.

Then too, all references to political parties, which had been espoused by the Executive Committee, and provided for in the Commission’s discussions, had been deleted by the Chairman presumably at the behest of those unauthorized actors. Yet again, this had resulted in another heated debate between the Chairman and some members until the word “political” was added to Article 19(6) of the drafts relative to social, economic and **cultural organizations**-thus, even if only indirectly, allowing for “political organizations” which would necessarily include parties and Civil Society Organizations (CSO’s) too! Yet, the Chairman claims that “competitive parties are guaranteed in the Constitution” (Vol. II, P 51) we ask him to cite such an article!

Thirdly, there was also controversy over the codicil “pursuant to the law”, principally qualifying the article on citizenship (Article 3) but also other articles. These provisions are reminiscent of Haile Selassie’s two constitutions.

Yet, the reader of the memoirs is barraged by boastful claims such as “the autonomy of the CCE was never compromised at anytime during the three-year period of Constitutional consultation” (Vol. II, P 116). The reviewers openly challenge the author, who is now shedding crocodile tears about the non-implementation of the Constitution, to refute these accusations.

7. Denigrations

These memoirs become particularly nasty and abhorrent when they make derogatory remarks about the author’s contemporaries with the singular purpose of portraying him favorably at the expense of the reputation of others and/or their families, especially when they may not be alive to protest their innocence and protect their integrity. *Ad-Hominem* remarks serve no useful

purpose or contribute to knowledge. On the other hand, they can-and usually do-cause pain to the victims, their offsprings, their relatives and friends. This is not to say that the truth shall not be told; but unsupported claims and allegations are immoral and should be scrupulously avoided. “**Pathography**”, a term used by many biographers to describe biographies which focus on the negative aspects of life including, *inter-alia*, the venomous, malicious or dishonest, is an excellent description of the two volumes.

“**Degradography**”, a term used for memoirs which rely on gossip, rumor and innuendo is an equally applicable word for these memoirs. Thus, there is no single reason for the following ill-advised comments about individuals, groups or cultures:

- “Abba Wolde-Ab, (not to be confused with Woldeab Woldemariam), the Amharic teacher at the Protestant Mission in Asmara, was a **drunkard**” (Vol. I, P 35);
- “Haile Kahsai was a **con man.**” (Vol. I, P 36)Then, he continues that “a con man, like a rapist, only thinks of having his will on the particular victim of the moment (Vol. I, P 37)...and (so) he tried to pull a fast one on me, again with the same disrespect for facts and for the victim’s intelligence” (Vol. I, P 37). Disrespect for facts? Disrespect for victims intelligence? **Hmm! Who does it remind the reader of?**
- “Dawit and I passed (i.e., examinations), Issac Abraha **failed**” (Vol. I, P 57);
- “I passed all the subjects, Zewde (Hailemariam) failed **presumably in all subjects**” (Vol. I, P 103); this is rank pettiness. When he too failed his examinations, he had the temerity (indeed Cheekiness) to inject “I was involved in too much political activity and did not concentrate on my studies” (Vol. I, P 103), thereby broadly hinting that, unlike him, others failed because they did not have problems of their own, like him, (including political activity even if readers were to accept his claims at face value);
- Neraio Isaias suffered from the problems of a “**mixed marital background,**” (Vol. I, P 136) completely ignoring that both of Neraio’s parents were from the same ethnic and religious groups, the “melamenti hawi” which he volubly refers to in Vol. II, P 171) (Tigrigna Lutherans from either side of the Mereb River divide (border between Tigrai and Eritrea) and that Neraio is, in fact, a nephew of one of Eritrea’s Founding Fathers and freedom fighters, Woldeab Woldemariam. **Ethnic hatred, what is thine name?**
- Belachew Asrat was an “**Amhara Chauvinist**” (Vol. I, P 137); “his background did show from time to time (and) “I did not want to impute any Chauvinism to Belachew, after all he had **Tigrean blood in his veins**”; this vulgar racism speaks for itself but it must be noted for the record that H.E. Belachew Asrat probably had more Eritrean than Amhara friends, is married to a Tigrean/Eritrean woman and was courteous **to a fault** with everybody!

- “One wonders what **unknown relations** (former Ethiopian Ambassador) Yoftahe Dimetros (an Eritrean) had with President Isaias to assume senior post at the Eritrean Patriarchate” (Vol. II, P 259); How about competence?
- “Habteab Bairu, **after dropping out** of the London School of Economics, turned to the leisurely life of aesthetics combined with the **pursuit of the company of women**” (Vol. I, P 124);
- (One-time EPLF Secretary General) Romadan Mohammed Nur, was “**a weakling**” who was used to “advance his (President Isaias’) agenda, until he outlived his usefulness and was **discarded like a used lemon**” (Vol. II, P 65);
- “Mr. Mesfin Wolde Mariam”, a geography Professor, “was elected as Chairman of the Inquiry Commission by the Ethiopian Parliament **not because of his qualifications** but because the author had arrived late from Washington D.C.” (Vol. I, P 270);
- “As for Seble, the fact that she was the Emperor’s granddaughter had been a barrier that I could not erase in my mind, even as she encouraged me to get closer to her and her royal family. Indeed, the family and especially her mother, Princess Tenagne Work, the Emperor’s oldest daughter ... often complained to people who knew me that I had **shunned her family** and preferred the Imru family over them” (Vol. I, P 104). Wedet kef, kef! (Amharic against wannabes)

What is to be said of all this malicious nonsense?

Then the narrative further degenerates into character assassination and malicious invectives.

Thus:

- In a handwritten note found in Fah (Sahel) circa 1975-76, the author had the gall to commit the heresy of condemning Woldeab Woldemariam, one of the iconic figures of the Eritrean Liberation struggle, a **CIA Agent**. (Sure; and Thomas Paine was a British Agent!). This confirms that this wretched man would not spare anyone to promote himself and to satisfy his ego. Yet, a time when it suits him (1989), he calls him his “mentor” and a “veteran Eritrean Freedom Fighter” (Vol. I, P 394) and quotes him as saying “Thank God. At last, they have started assigning the right man to the right job” (ibid).
- “Some people have been forced by personal or family obligations to seek close association with royalty as **Mr. Seyoum Hargot did** in marrying one of Princess Tenagnework’s daughters” (Vol. I, P 105) and then adds that Seyoum himself **told** him that “**his marriage was motivated by political concerns**”. Then, to add insult to injury, he observes that he did not know “if he (i.e. Seyoum) reported the **exchange to them**” (i.e. the Royal Family, Vol. I, P 105) and also stresses that

“Seyoum was appointed all the way to the level of a cabinet Minister because of this connection” (Vol. I, P 105). **Oh, jealous heart!** Unbelievably, he calls the late Seyoum “a friend” (Vol. II, P 107);

- “Kassa Woldemariam was appointed President of the University by **Imperial appointment**...because he was **married** to another of the Emperor’s granddaughter” and that **“he would not have been appointed president of the University without his royal connection”** (Vol. I, P. 105). This deliberately ignores the fact that the Emperor, as Chancellor of the University, had the sole authority to appoint the President of the University and that, in any case, Presidents are appointed for the recognition of their place in, and their consequent influence on, civil as well as political, society in addition to a fairly good educational and professional background and management skills. President Kassa had all these factors going in his favor, did extremely well as President and he is, to this day, considered the best President that the University had in its seventy years history;
- Professor James Paul “...has **fallen prey** to the **affliction common to holders of high office**. His appointment as Academic Vice President had gotten the better of him, of his advocacy for the rule of law...(and) **ambition, a taste of power had affected his sense of integrity and freedom”** (Vol. I, P 217). Yet, **it was to the same man that he went when he needed help in exile**; talk about self-respect! This Qiletam (Amharic), Qelil (Tigrigna) has none!
- Fitawrari Tafese Habtemichael is condemned **not for who he was but** for being **“a member of the Amhara nobility** known as the **Adesghe**, most of whom were big landowners who **exploited** the peasants who handed over three quarters of the product to them” (Vol. I, P 85). This is a case of **guilt by association** which may not spare his “benefactor”, Ras Imru. Was it only the Adesghe who were feudal lords in Imperial Ethiopia? How different were Ras Seyoum of Tigrai and the Wag Shums, Were-Sheiks, the Aba Jifars, and the Harari Amharas?
- Getachew Mekasha, a **“boastful” Amhara chauvinist** (Vol. I, P 174), was **“chosen to head the delegation because of his loyalty to the Imperial regime and his membership in the ruling class. The rest of us were selected on the basis of some merit”** (Vol. I, P 175). (N.B. Ambassador Getachew was a college graduate and Vice-or perhaps Assistant-Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time. Thus he was eminently capable of leading a group at what, after all, was only a non-diplomatic conference (i.e. All Africa Peoples Conference);
- “Getachew Mekasha did **not hide his pride in his class and ethnic i.e., Amhara origins** and his chauvinism vis-à-vis other Africans and making fun of their names” ... [and] “Getachew’s chauvinism was not limited to other Africans; he was also contemptuous of other ethnic groups of Ethiopia” (Vol. I, P 124);

- Worku Habetwold reverted to the “**ethnic temptation**” (i.e., of demeaning Eritreans and other non-Amharas) “after **failing his exams**” (Vol. I, P 68). Again, that ethnic hatred;
- The officer in the Ministry of Interior is described as “an Ethiopian (who) would have been **obsequious and respectful**” (Vol. I, P XII) because the author took offense at the way he treated him on not a particularly propitious occasion;
- Sebhat Efrem “**remains a puppet Minister of Defense** at the beck and call of the Commander in Chief” (Vol. II, P 201);
- The Eritreans for Liberation in North America (EFLNA) which did a magnificent job in presenting the case of the Eritrean struggle for independence to the government, academia, media and civil society of the US and the UN long before - and even after - the author belatedly (end of 1975) joined the EPLF, is denigrated as “an arrogant edge **which later became a carbon copy of the EPLF**” (Vol. II, P 228-229) as if that is considered a crime. It would be just to remember that the members of the EFLNA joined the EPLF **severally and collectively** but **freely** and were, unlike him, not under **circumspecting** conditions.
- Some of the diaspora elite are denounced as “**cohorts**” and “**blind purveyors**” of the regime’s (i.e., Eritrean government’s) propaganda and for “denying the stark facts staring in their face” (i.e. the facts according to the gospel of “Bereket-Ab!”) and accused of “material interest and downright opportunism” (Vol. II, P 222) (which begs the question: who, of all people, is accusing these people of such moral weaknesses?);
- Many of the leaders of the Eritrean opposition are “**chips from the same block**” (Vol. II, P 28);

The worst however, is reserved for the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki. The author admits that “I was among those who believed Isaias to be an outstanding leader with sterling qualities, brilliant, dedicated, incorruptible and committed to democracy and justice” (Vol. II, P 63) as well as “intelligent and single-minded in the pursuit of his aims (Vol. II, P 184). Indeed, there is concrete evidence of his unrestrained admiration of the President, some-expressed in poetry, that support these ostentatious remarks. These lasted until, at least, the last years of the 20th century-after the Eritrean-Ethiopian War. Then, twenty five years later, he starts to call him “a power-hungry man” (Vol. II, P 62); “an egotistical maniac” (Vol. II, P 39), “a psychotic personality” (Vol. II, P 69); “deceptive and vindictive” (Vol. II, P 62); “gambler” (Vol. II, P 176); “grim reaper” (Vol. II, P 261); “a heartless man” (Vol. II, P 62); “inveterate master of deception and obfuscation” (Vol. II, P 73); “a hard-hearted ruthless leader” (Vol. II, P 188) who “suffers from delusions of grandeur and from a messianic complex” (Vol. II, P 278) as well as “paranoia” (Vol. II, P 188) and “narcissism” (Vol. II, P 27); and who “turned himself into a prophet” (Vol. II, P 10); “betrays a monarchical predilection” (Vol. II, P 86); “secretive” (Vol. II, P 88) and “addicted to power”; (Vol. II, P 60). The list is endless.

Then, he denounces him for having “called the constitution a piece of paper” (Vol. II, P 267), and regarding the law “as an inconvenience, (and) at best an obstacle to be removed at an opportune time” (Vol. II, P 74); condemns him for “decimating democratic elements” (i.e. the Menkae Movement) for “demanding accountability” (Vol. II, P 65), although he himself had in an earlier section declared that “the whole story must be told” and that “Isaias and his collaborators had a lot of explaining to do” (Vol. II, P 68). Surely, hell has no fury like the wounded ego of an octogenarian loser!

It is inconceivable that the personality of a leader, especially a young revolutionary leader, will remain unchanged for decades in spite of inexorable changes, problems and ordeals that are integral components of any revolutionary struggle. His training in revolutionary theory must have molded practice, but experience too must have molded theory. To this are added the vagaries and vicissitudes of struggle as well as relations between, and within, parties and groups. This will have had impacts not only on the development of skills but also on his character. It is therefore difficult to understand that the author, empowered with all of the presumed “analytical” skills “astute observations” and his scholarly knowledge of Eritrean society and culture, as well as his “long” association with, and practical contribution to, the struggle, his erudition and long life experience, personal and working relations, with the higher echelons of the leadership of the EPLF and his insightfulness, was unable to notice any changes in the President’s behavior and *modus operandi* – indeed, to be the victim of, in his own terms, “an immaculate deception” – until after the country had been liberated for at least ten years. The author, nevertheless, expects readers to believe him and accept all of this at face value. Talk about a poison pen!

Needless to say, it would have been revelatory if readers were to benefit from information on how, why and when Isaias has fallen from the author’s pedestal of grace, whether Isaias has been a “blood thirsty brute” from the beginning or whether he had steadily evolved from a brash college freshman to an astute revolutionary imbued with Maoist theories on violence. Did he, assuming he had for arguments sake, become cunning, battle-hardened and ruthless and then cunning and degenerate garden-variety tyrant as the result of sustained Florentine duplicity of inter-and intra- group politics that dominated the liberation struggle. Was it true that the liberation struggle was permeated with abundant murders, purges and mass campaigns? If so, what were the reasons for such a culture? How did he survive – indeed become popular with the people, including with some of the G15, to this day? It will also have been good if the author had informed the reader how, in the end, he had found about the immaculate deception. Was it fortuitous or studied? Did he hear a heavenly voice? Or was it a vision? And, what did he do about it before he wrote his memoirs. Can he really feign ignorance, naiveté, even if he trusted too much? Can he expect any reasonable reader to believe him?

The question must also be asked: Why did he abandon his faith in the EPLF and its leader? One conclusion can be made on the basis of his previous record. He had found out that association with the EPLF was no longer profitable financially and politically because he was aware that:

- a) He had already taken the last penny he could squeeze out of the EPLF! There were too many protests against his insatiable avarice both at the Constitutional Commission and elsewhere.
- b) The political tidal waves both domestic and foreign, particularly Hurricane Washington, were not favorable,

It was this time for the Chameleon to change its colors. After all, it is in perfect harmony with the principles of “Pragmatism in the interest if higher cause!

Recent literature on the politics and history of the liberation struggle had not been neutral or objective. Indeed it had been acrimonious and inflammatory. It was thus hoped that the memoirs of an academic who has started his involvement in the Eritrean struggle as “a peacemaker” (although it was not solicited by any party), would provide the reader with much needed objective account of what had happened and how and why it had happened. Present and future generations would have benefited from a detached, balanced and relatively detailed account of the complexity of the problems that afflicted and defined the liberation struggle; Isaias’ role within, and relationship with the leadership of, the ELF, the creation and development of the EPLF, relations within the EPLF, institutions and structures of the Front and its successor, the PFDJ, which is now the ruling party. Any reflection on NEHNAN ILAMANAN, the EPLF manifesto, and other such documents, would have meant a lot. Unfortunately, most of his accounts on this matter are based on rumor, hearsay, and gossip which is to be found in the popular, public domain.

Isaias’ portrayal gets even worse when he is unfairly compared to the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. This comparison is a deliberate, misleading effort to favorably present the late Prime Minister, for whatever reason and/or motive, and to slander the President. Thus,

- “Isaias has a domineering personality with a tendency to reject out of hand, often with sarcasm” (Vol. II, P 84), and that “...he cannot tolerate anyone boldly asserting a principled position that happened to contradict his own position”. By contrast, “Meles is an ingratiating personality that places a high premium on civility,” and a “persuasive argument instead of domination” (Vol. II, P 84);
- “Prime Minister Meles is easy to talk to, very engaging in conversations, witty and extremely articulate” (Vol. II, P 185) ...and “clearly a man of destiny whose soft demeanor deceptively concealed an iron will. This trait has been subsequently demonstrated time and again” (Vol. II, P 185);
- Isaias is “dismissive and rude,” in stark contrast to Meles’ “smooth and poised performances,” and therefore “it is **possible that Isaias was frustrated by being upstaged by Meles** whom everyone praised and listened” (Vol. II, P 85);
- “Meles [was] brilliant at the General Wingate Secondary School ... an elite British-run school [while Isaias] was an average student”. “He did not take part in sports” (how about Meles?) [and that] “...there is **an unconfirmed** report that he **failed his examination** to

pass to the second year”...[and that] “he decided to join the armed struggle (**if not mainly**) **because of his failure**” (Vol. II, P 85);

- “Whereas Meles relies on his power of persuasion with full confidence in his oratorical and analytical skills, Isaias prefers imposing his will by sheer dominance over and around him” (Vol. II, P 86);
- “Whereas Meles is tolerant and allows some space for those who hold their views, even while [he maintains] a hawk-eyed vigilance, Isaias is intolerant, eliminates and freezes into insignificance anyone who disagrees with him” (Vol. II, 86);
- “Whereas **Meles pays more than lip service to the rule of law** and brings errant opponents to justice through the normal legal process, Isaias shows no respect for the rule of law and has detained opponents without trial, often for several years” (Vol. II, P 86);
- “Whereas Meles believes adhering to the rule of law, Isaias has shelved the constitution and **rules by decree**, not **unlike kings of old**” (Vol. II, P 86);

These unashamedly unbalanced comparisons inevitably egg the reader to reflect on the issues and raise some questions of fairness. The late Prime Minister Meles is portrayed as a suave and intelligent person endowed with courtly manners and polished language as well as social grace and political *savoir-faire* and as being committed to democratic values and the rule of law. On the contrary, President Isaias is described as a witless and uncultured man **born** with a **mean streaked, demonic** temper and intolerance, which is aggravated by a modest educational background and total disdain for the rule of law and democratic values.

A discerning reader will ask whether the author can claim to know the late Prime Minister well enough to lavish him with such accolades especially because of the short length of time, and the small number of times that he had met the Prime Minister. Is he, in all fairness, qualified to be a good judge? Is this the same person that had praised Isaias vociferously? And will he be as unkind to Meles after, to use one of his favorite term, he has “squeezed him like a lemon”?

Then too, it is not the rank and file “Amhara” that contemptuously reviled the late Prime Minister, but also his Tigrean contemporaries, including those that had fought alongside him as comrades in-arms, that consider him to be a mean, ruthless and cunning despot. (Check for example, books, articles and interviews by Aregawi Berhe, Seye Abraha, Belai Gessesse, Tecola W. Hagos and Alemayehu Gebremariam). This being so, does not the average reader have the moral duty-and the right-to question the author’s motives, especially in view of this excessive demonization of President Isaias? Would readers be necessarily wrong if they assume that the author was not a neutral person and that he is answering to certain inner **urges**, and **forces** on the basis of “Pragmatism in the interest of a higher cause”? This blatant, one-sided and negative portrait of, and the transparent angst against, and hatred for, Isaias may be considered as a striking illustration of the author’s desperate attempt to make peace, and ingratiate himself, with what to him seems to be the upcoming elite of Eritrean politics. It can be safely so assumed in view of his recent activities in the Eritrean diaspora and continuing contacts with Ethiopian

officialdom in Addis Ababa. **But, will it be long before the ecstasies of a summer of pragmatism for the greater cause yield to the wailings of a winter of yet another immaculate deception?**

Such pandering is counterproductive since, under these circumstances, a neutral reader will only end up in sympathizing with the victims of his horrendous and cheap character assassinations. The author must be aware that anyone with any sense of fairness and justice will be disturbed by his loss of fairness, balance and professionalism. This is in no way defending Isaias. Isaias can defend himself. Or, an attempt to cast doubts about, or aspersions on, the late Prime Minister Meles. That is not our interest and we are above it. Yet it is quite another matter not to be an objective and neutral writer.

The author only seriously compromises his integrity, and does himself a disservice, when he attempts to elevate himself above others by casting aspersion on their reputation. **Respect and esteem are acquired not by destroying others but by winning the trust and love of people.** Vilification is the weapon of the weak, it is said. Vilification, based on distortions, lies and speculations must surely be “the arsenal of, (to use Winston Churchill’s phraseology), a person who is the **repository and embodiment of soul-destroying hatred.**” He hates **others** because they have succeeded. He hates **himself** because he has failed.

8. Human relations

It is also clear that the author did not have good relations with almost any of his colleagues and peers. Thus:

- “There was no love lost between us.” (i.e., Dejazmach Kifle Ergetu, the Minister of Interior and his boss) (Vol. I, P X);
- “I had run-ins with officials of the Security Department (one of the Departments in the Ministry of Interior)” (Vol. I, P XIII);
- “I was to revise my (good) views” (on) Neraio Isaias later (Vol. I, P 127).

9. Political beliefs

It is, at this stage, opportune to refer to what, if any, may constitute his “Political beliefs”. In spite of his claims “to have been” under the spell of socialist ideology (Vol. I, P 91) and that he was, in fact, “**a Marxist turned social democrat**” (Vol. I, P 125) and “...preferred **reform to revolution**” (Vol. I, P 125), there is no written or other evidence to support these claims. He even admits that “our (i.e., the students of his generation) “irresistible ideas” would crush on the reality of an immovable object” (Vol. I, P125). On the other hand, there is more than ample evidence in the memoirs, that far from being a “leftist”, he was, in fact, nothing more than an opportunist who, in his own words, “**would try any and every means to achieve his aim.**” (See for example Vol. I, P 107)

There is nothing in these memoirs which remotely suggests that he had a vision with a set of values, principles and an articulated program, while **there is enough material to indicate that his personal interests determined and shaped his thoughts, feelings and actions.** He claims to have been influenced by the writings of Bernard Shaw (Vol. I, P 80) and the lectures and public addresses of labor leaders of the left like Anueran Bevan from whom he learned that “principled commitment to the cause of democracy and justice [was] one of the articles of faith of SOCIALISM which became my cause for years to come” (Vol. I, P 90).

Unfortunately, there is nothing in his professional life that suggests he was practicing what he professed to be his beliefs. It is however clear, from his writings that, although he was aware of the great iniquities and follies of the imperial system, he, in fact, admired, lusted and yearned for acceptance by, and belonging to, the social and political elite of the imperial system. Thus, when he was, in his own terms, “unfairly repatriated” to Ethiopia, his reaction to this “injustice” was not to reject and sever relations with what he considered to be a discriminatory system (state) and live in exile, as would have been expected of him, and what others, including his friend Chanyalew Gugsa, (Vol. I, P 102) had done before and after him. Instead, he decides to return to Ethiopia and **operate within the core value system** of an anachronistic cultural and political paradigm. He searches for an *Amalaj* (an intercessor) who would speak on his behalf from the aristocratic elite, supplicates him for assistance during his *dejitinat* (begging for an audience with the high and the mighty). As a matter of fact, he had already began his search for such a person even before he left London (thus defining his state of mind and instinctive reactions) by pleading with the daughters of Ras Imru (Alemseged) and the Princess Tenageworq’s daughter, and thus the Emperor’s granddaughter (Seble). This, of course, resonates very well among the elite of the realm since it assured them that “the subjects” (not citizens) knew their place in society and passively (re)acted as they are expected to do. He describes his visit to Ras Imru’s house as follows: “In fact, when I was there (the Imru residence) for the first time, I found a long line of petitioners” (Vol. I, P 110)...and “**felt elated** because that was to be the door that opened (sic) the Emperor’s door for me” (Vol. I, P 114) and that “**I was beyond words**” (Vol. I, P 115). He “**blesses Seble and Alemseged but not Tseggai**” (Eyassu), the Eritrean nationalist and activist who, as we had seen earlier, had advised him to avoid such people at all cost (Vol. I, P 115). That was not all. In his determination to “**try any and every means to achieve the aim of returning to England**” (Vol. I, P 107), he practices the Byzantine art of searching for “inside information” (Vol. I, P 108) talk to persons who could talk to persons who would talk to other persons; walked kilometers in the corridors of powers, knocked at the doors of Directors General, Ministers, Feudal Rasses (nobility or dignitaries), bowed before any petty official and begged the almighties of Empire. There, by the grace of the gods of servility, genuflects a closet rebel! And he seems to have relished all of it. Thus, it would be good to mention once again his presence before the Princess:

“She motioned me to sit down on a smaller sofa in front of her. That **shocked me beyond words for I had heard that one does not sit with Royalty unless one is royalty** and I knew I had not

an iota of **blue blood** in my veins. Instead of doing as she asked, I stood. She then told me **firmly** to sit down. **I SAT DOWN!**" Unbelievable!

His penchant for fine whisky (Johnnie Walker Black Label) (Vol. I, P 236) is understandable because it is the nature of wannabe social climbers (for emphasis Black Label is bracketed!)

This does not describe a free-spirited rebel but an obsequious and weak man with a total lack of any self-esteem. He further exposes his real nature and character, as well as the sources of his sociopolitical values when he carefully avoids to show his anger and indignation when his friend Chanyalew refers to Mengistu Hailemariam as "Baria". That word (slave, as the author knows it) does not only signify the socio-economic circumstances (bondage, serfdom) of the human being which, in and of itself, would be bad, but also harbors the psychological connotation of "inferior being" (i.e., nigger). It was habitually used by the Amhara and Tigreans in disparagement. He explains: "Now, there was a time when I would have contested the use of the word "Baria" and chided him for it. But that evening I kept quiet, **fearful that the hindsight into the psychology of Mengistu might be right**" (Vol. I, P 276). Good grief!

A close look at the ideological background of the disparate personalities whom he had admired or with whom he had either a personal or working relationship is also revealing. Dejazmach Takele Woldehawariat was a confirmed royalist whose sole and burning ambition was the replacement of Emperor Haile Selassie by any other member of the Royal family, including Lij Eyassu. General Aman Mikael Andom was a charismatic and swashbuckling Army General who, at best, may have had liberal views but whose extent of "change" did not go beyond the British-style Constitutional Monarchy and, at worst, may have ended up being a garden-variety strongman akin to Latin America Caudillos, Japanese Shoguns or even Ethiopian *Reise Mequanints* (Eg. Mikael Sehul, and the *Were Sheik* (Wollo) Brothers Ali of the Zemene Mesafint). Germame Neway was an avowed Marxist who would have had nothing to do with "social democrats", Mengistu Hailemariam was worse than Stalin or Hitler, Hirui Tedla Bairu espoused a village-based government structure, probably similar to the Swiss Canton system and Isaias Afwerki had perhaps wisely improvised on Chairman Mao's concepts of liberation and class struggle. It could, therefore, not have been possible for the author, who has described himself as a Social Democrat, albeit one who is ready to establish an enduring political relationship with any one unless of course it is prohibited by "pragmatism for the higher cause".

- He claims that some of his friends and relatives "regarded my resignation and decision to go back to school an **ignominious descent from an escalated position to inglorious anonymity**" ... and, "How can he **descend to the level of the masses**"!! (Vol. I, P 215). "**The level of the MASSES**"! The level of the masses! Is he for real?

On the other hand, it becomes self-evident that he had been trying **to be a different person to different parties at different times or, even worse, at the same time** in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. One Eritrean savant, in a soon-to-be published work, writes, for example, that "one

never understood which side he belonged to. When he was with the Foreign Office (i.e. the Foreign Mission of the EPLF led by Osman Saleh Sabbe which had split with the EPLF Leadership) you hear him referring to the leadership in the “Field” as a “bunch of kids”, “especially” when he was **out to get something from Osman Sabbe**. When presenting his case to the EPLF leadership, he used all sorts of defaming factors (sic) including labeling the Foreign Office people as “CIA Agents?” (communication to an Eritrean Ambassador, Chapter 16 of a forthcoming memoir). It is a matter of record, observable in the memoirs, that such unbounded fickleness and opportunism had been the root-cause of all the difficult problems he encountered in his life and condemned him to marginalization at all times. Of the **living** leaders he had associated himself with, none (i.e., Mengistu, Heruii or Isaias) speaks of him favorably; and we await the fate of his relations with the Eritrean opposition as well as the EPRDF. (Maybe Wiki leaks will have something for the public soon)!

A corollary to such inconsistency of principles is his consistent refusal to take sides on critical issues which he deems not to serve his interests. Not only does he insist to “leave to History” (Vol. II, P 249) the issue of Muslim/Christian relations in Eritrea but he also refuses to go “into too much detail” in how the two sides (Eritrea/Ethiopia) explained the cause of war (Vol. II, P 88), decides that several current issues in Eritrea “are topics for another day” (Vol. II, P 264) and even desists from commenting on the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s perplexing remark about “Ethiopia’s right to expel anybody on the basis of the color of his eyes” (Vol. II, P 85). In fact, he admires him as a man with “an iron will” (Vol. II, P 85).

His discussions of current Eritrean political issues is thus also **interest-oriented**. It focuses, *inter-alia*, on the drafting of the Constitution and its place in Eritrean history, democracy and development, state and religion, land, leadership and the Eritrean-Ethiopian war.

It is clear that the author is abandoning or modifying some long-held beliefs and positions with the hope of securing a niche in Eritrean history by aligning his new positions (though **it is very difficult to discuss the author and principles, values, beliefs etc. in the same vein**), and thus currying the favor of what he anticipates to be the next generation of Eritrean political forces and their foreign supporters, including the late Meles Zenawi’s Ethiopia. He contributes his own views to the on-going, heated but generally healthy, debate on the issues only when some detractors had criticized him, and, on these occasions, he opted to support, fully or partially, the contributions and agendas offered by others. He actually apologized when his old positions had been in stark contradiction with the agenda of the new or presumably emerging elite. In the process, there emerges a deliberate **chameleonic** change of political color. The most glaring examples in this respect are his near-total endorsement of the contents of “The Eritrean Covenant! Towards sustainable Justice and Peace”, by Majlis Ibrahim Muktar, Awate.com, 10/02/10 (Vol. II, P 276), and his apology to Omar Jabir who wrote an article entitled: “Dr. Bereket: From the Unknown to the Uncertain”, Awate.com, 10/02/10, criticizing him for his past and present positions. (Vol. II, P 270-277) The only exception is his adamant-indeed

intransigent-position on the legitimacy of the Constitutional Commission and the continued validity of the Constitution. In defense of the Commission's work, he declares:

“Are we to ignore three years of dedication work involving knowledgeable Eritreans...are we to ignore the participation of the vast majority of the Eritrean people simply because a minority of representatives of opposition groups chose not to participate despite their right to do so?” (Vol. II, P 127)

In defense of the Constitution, he declares: “Despite the fact that it remains unimplemented, the Constitution of Eritrea is alive.” (Vol. II, P 128)

Yet, he also concedes that “The prognosis on the future place of the Constitution is that it will remain intact in its major parts” (Vol. II, P 128), thus recognizing that the Constitution will not be acceptable to future governments without numerous amendments. This is of course before the people concerned had the information that, in fact, he himself had destroyed its legitimacy.

10. The Ethiopian – Eritrean War

Any discussion of all the issues will have to be outside the purview of this critique for two reasons. First, the author himself had, as seen above, decided not to delve into the issues with greater detail. Indeed, he has declared that most of them “are topics for another day.” Secondly, the complexity of the issues deny any possibility of a meaningfully detailed analysis. It is, therefore, neither fair nor justified to do so. However, one issue, the Eritrean – Ethiopian war, has been singled out as a representative case if only because it is current and thus easily resonates to Eritreans, Ethiopians and interested foreigners alike.

He contributes little new on the issue. Like others before him (see for example, several articles in Eritrean websites written during and after the war by *inter- alia*, Prof. Tekie Fessehatsion, Saleh Yunus, Alemseged Tesfai and Amare Tekle, as well as articles by Richard Reid and Tekeste, & Tronvoll, quoted by the author in the memoirs, Terrence Lyon, Lencho Letta etc.), he refers to the mutual mistrust, **obduracy** and “...clashing or colliding egos of the two leaders,” (Vol. II P 89) and that the Ethiopians were convinced that Isaias Afwerki “had (and may still entertain) regional, hegemonic ambitions to be the master of the Horn of Africa” (Vol. II P 89).

Yet, it is in spite of this that the author blames Isaias alone for the start of the war and the non-demarcation of the border. Unfortunately, the author also mistakenly and inappropriately refers to Meles Zenawi's essay on **Bonapartism** (Vol. II P 89) as having been directed against the Eritrean President. In reality, the article was targeting former Ethiopian Defense Minister and TPLF stalwart, Seye Abraha, and was written during the intra-party power struggle immediately after the war. It had nothing to do with foreign policy, territorial expansionism and hegemonism. It is a Marxist Leninist concept which refers to the corruption of power by “counter - revolutionary cliques” on behalf of, and to benefit, a small, self- serving elite.

He then refers to the continued apprehension of Eritreans about the TPLF's ambition and hidden agenda to create an Independent "Greater Tigray" as declared in its 1975 manifesto, (Vol. II, P 89) and to those **Ethiopians** who "by and large did not accept the fact of Eritrea's separation" (and that) "separation was anathema - especially to the central Ethiopians or centrists (i.e. the Amhara) who had hitherto monopolized most of the key government positions." (Vol. II, P 89) He further adds that **Eritrean negotiators** with Ethiopia on currency and other economic matters had concluded that "their Ethiopian counterparts were determined to subject Eritrean economic autonomy to Ethiopia's requirements which they regarded as a rearguard action of political nature, masked with economic rationality, (and that) it was aimed at undermining the political self-determination and independence that had been won with so much sacrifices, independence that was still not accepted in the minds of the Ethiopians" (Vol. II P 90).

The causes of war merited more elaboration and, in all fairness, a balanced presentation of the Ethiopian ("Amhara") view should have been made more thoroughly to make sense to future readers.

Then too, if the author had earlier decided to leave judgment and blame on who started the war, he actually takes a position on the implementation of the EEBC decision. He thus forthrightly declares:

"In terms of legality, Eritrea's insistence on the implementation is obviously well-founded, grounded as it is on the outcome of the binding arbitration." (Vol. II P 172)

On the other hand, he retreats into his cocoon of obfuscation and equivocation, and immediately qualifies it by advocating that:

"Ethiopia's insistence on a 'human consideration,' or remembering the population that would be affected by automatic implementation **cannot be dismissed out of hand.**" (Vol. II P 172)

This is simple pandering. The author is a constitutional lawyer who knows the meaning of "final and binding" decisions in arbitration. He also is not unaware that Ethiopia was harping on the need to scrupulously implement the decision without "buts, ifs and maybes". He also knows that the decision is *ex aequo et bono*; i.e. that it is not subject to discussion, let alone change, **without the express consent of both parties**, and this was made equivocally clear by the EEBC. Even when it is self-evident that it is in the interest of both parties to discuss such "Human Security" issues (Human Geography as presented by the Ethiopian government, "human reconsideration" as used by the author makes no sense). It must be realized that any "**dialogue**" can take place only **after** the creation of an environment which fosters **mutual trust and good will**.

Such an environment does not exist and **cannot exist**, until after the implementation of the decision, especially following the policy decisions adopted by Ethiopia and its allies –

particularly the US – in the aftermath of the announcement of the decision. Here is a chronology of events:

- Immediately after the announcement of the EEBC decision, Ethiopia not only hailed it as just but also urged its **immediate acceptance without any reservations**. It also exhorted the UN and the international community to ensure that Eritrea accepts and implements the decision without any further ado;
- A day later, Ethiopia finds out that the village of **Badme**, the flash point of the war, had been awarded to Eritrea;
- Soon thereafter, it officially informed the Secretary General of the UN that it finds the decision to be **“terminally” flawed** and that, therefore, he should create an **Alternative Mechanism** to resolve the conflict;
- When Ethiopia found this position was **legally and politically** untenable, it announced its acceptance of the decision **in principle**, but that Eritrea must be forced to accept dialogue to address issues of “human geography”;
- On May 13, 2002, Ethiopia made a request for interpretation, correction and consultation. The EEBC, rejecting it, declared that “(it) does not find in any of the items anything that identifies any uncertainty in the decision nor in any case made for revision”. In the mean time, the US Government sent a representative to the EEBC with the view to making it change its decision. The members of the Commission who were not amused were adamant in the rejection of the request, and announced that they will finalize their work by submitting a **virtual demarcation** of the border if Ethiopia persists in refusing to allow demarcation on the ground (i.e. *sur place*) during that year;
- The commission submitted its virtual demarcation **declaring it to be the official border between the two countries**. It finalized its work in 2007. Eritrea **accepted** the decision but it is still to be accepted by Ethiopia. The Security Council ended its discussion of the issue in 2009.

Such a diplomatic and political environment, reeking with illegality, favoritism, blackmail and arm-twisting could not, in any way, be conducive to any kind of dialogue – especially when its singular purpose was to overturn the EEBC decision. It is therefore patently dishonest on the part of the author to, in the face of all these, declare:

“Why is Isaias allergic to such talk? Does he consider such talks as capitulation? Or surrender of principles? Is it a matter of pride, or is it a tactical ploy designed to maintain a state of tension the better to make life difficult for Meles?” (Vol. II P 181)

Not so, Professor. President Isaias and Eritreans will remain steadfast in the implementation of the EEBC’s “final and binding decision” because it is the right and honorable thing to do and because they wish to acquit themselves before the tribunals of justice, morality and history.

By so doing, they would be protecting not only Eritrea’s interests but also:

- Promote and safeguard the **sanctity of international law**;
- the **integrity of the future arbitration commissions** which will be making decisions based on this case;
- **Protect the UN** and its Charter;
- Remind the **high and mighty** of our time that they **cannot be above the rule of law**;
- **Remind the rest of the world** (especially small but principled states) that it will be their turn in the near future;
- Continue the banishment of decisions that will mete out grotesque inequities against small states much as the **historically discredited League of Nations** did against Ethiopia; and
- The follies of **academic charlatans** and **interest-oriented** activists like you.

His view on the deleterious role of the US government is also mendacious. On the one hand, he declares that “the US government has been **unwilling or unable to cause** the implementation of the verdict of the Hague (sic) Commission” (Vol. II P 177) but, on the other hand, declares that “there is no way of proving the existence of such bias (i.e. against Eritrea) at the highest government level but that such bias may be purely personal” (Vol. II P 180), and

“Certainly, both during the mediation effort at the height of the 1998-2000 war and after the decision of the EEBC, there has been no record of US government bias favoring Ethiopia.” (Vol. II, P 180)

It is very interesting to note that the lawyer in him comes out since he demands for proof, records and evidence when he is defending the US, while he himself had been guilty of not doing that in the memoirs. There is **documentary evidence** in the public domain which refutes this assertion. It certainly could not have escaped the attention of almost all educated Eritreans including, in particular, the author himself, that Jendayi Frazier was sending memorandums to Ambassador John Bolton, then Permanent Representative of the US to the United Nations containing such official bias. To his credit, Ambassador Bolton ignored them. In his memoir, entitled “**Surrender is not an option**” (Threshold publishers, 2007, P 347) he explicitly declares:

“For reasons I never understood Frazier **reversed cause**, and asked me in early February 2006 **to reopen the 2002 decision**, which she had concluded was wrong, and award a major piece of disputed territory to Ethiopia. I was at a loss how to explain it to the Security Council, so I didn’t.”

The EEBC is also on record about the attempted interference in its work with the view to reversing its decision by a US official envoy, Admiral George Falford. The Commission rejected any such interference in its works. (See supra)

The then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Jendayi Frazier herself, in a press conference given at the State Department, declares:

“I have always **advocated** that it has to **involve dialogue** between the countries because clearly what was Eritrea’s have been given to Ethiopia, territory that is Ethiopian has been given to Eritrea.”

Then too, she has declared:

“I think in terms of the issues of Badme, it is beyond Badme. It is that the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission has made a **decision on delimitation**. It has to now do the **demarcation**... In order to **demarcate**, you have to have **dialogue** between the two parties because the **Algiers Agreement basically says that** the demarcation has to be done **according to what is just and reasonable**. (Voice of America Interview, February, 2006) This is patently untrue. There is not one reference in the Algiers Agreement that even broadly hints – let alone provide for explicitly – about **dialogue** or allowing the Commission to make decisions *ex aequo et bono* and she knows – or should have known – that. Indeed, as mentioned above, the agreements forbid the Commission from making such decisions.

Now the **definition** and **implication** of **dialogue** have been made irrevocably clear by her: **Invalidate the EEBC decision**. Frazier had repeated the same arguments in many other following interviews. Yet, the author claims that **no official attempt** was made to destroy the EEBC decision. This is disgraceful. What should the US have done to make its attempts “**official**”? Invade Eritrea?

More importantly, the author must have been in a much better position than others to know about US policy on the war and on the Horn of Africa since he claims that he was in the loop and was regularly approached by several individuals representing the US (Vol. II P 136). As a matter of fact, it is now known that he was retained as a consultant by the foreign policy establishment of the US and advised Anthony Lake, the Chief US mediator and others. It was for this reason, for example, that he declined an invitation by the Eritrean Government to join an Eritrean delegation in one of the mediation meetings held in Washington DC. His excuse was that he was working with “other parties”. Self-interest speaks much, much louder than Patriotism according to the commandments of pragmatism in the interest of the higher cause.

Finally, he concludes that the Eritrean government **used the war as an excuse for the “detention” of the constitution** (Vol. II P 105). This is insane. Does it take a war to suspend the Constitution? Was it the only way? In any case, Eritreans enjoyed enough, if not total, constitutional and human right even before the adoption of the Constitution. They had some, if not complete, rights in existing Ethiopian laws which the government had provisionally adopted with some modifications until the time that the state could build its own legal system. Even more importantly, Eritreans could have recourse to human, political, economic, social, cultural and numerous other rights enshrined in major international instruments and bodies of law when the government created a **Special Court**, which violated some of these laws. Yet, the author had actually **justified** and **approved the creation of that institution**. Does he now have the moral

authority to obsessively make clamorous statements about the constitution-a constitution, which was first violated by him; but then he can always justify his actions as pragmatism in the interest of a higher cause.

11. Literary style

It is often said that any meaningful assessment or judgment of a memoir must include references to the literary style of the author. Memoirs must be **readable** and their contents must be easily **verifiable**. The presence or absence of a good literary style is thus a critical determinant in the quality of the memoirs. When a reader is, because of the literary style of an author, shrewdly denied the ability to pass judgments on events or persons, or has to spend a frustratingly enormous time and energy to separate chaff from grain, then it becomes evident that the author is determined (a) to hide the truth in order to ensure uncritical acceptance of his version of events and judgments of persons and/or (b) to avoid scrupulous scrutiny of his version of events.

In these memoirs, the author seems to have refined three modes of obfuscation. The first is an attack on the integrity, dignity, intelligence or even **ethnic** backgrounds of persons who are no more with us to defend themselves, and/or have not left any written accounts, or original documents, which could be used to refute his charges. Alternatively, he makes references to unsubstantiated utterances of persons, especially the Emperor, dignitaries of the realm or senior officials of the government of Ethiopia and Eritrea or information received from unnamed persons which are meant to give a ring of authority to his often quixotic claims. For example, “**the Emperor always called me Bereket-ab**” (Vol. II, P 236), (obviously in feudal fondness), quotes the highly-reserved and prudent Bitwoded Asfaha Woldemichael as having said to him in Italian “Avete relazione con la ragazza, e vero?” (Vol. II, P 113) (Translation: Is it true that you had an affair with the young lady?) to support his earlier insinuations that Seble, Princess Tenagnework’s daughter, had fallen for him (Vol. I, P 104-5). Even more boldly, he recounts an intimate conversation with non-other than the Emperor himself (Vol. I, P XV-XVI).

The reader must be forgiven if he ends concluding that the author is trying to turn his hallucinations (*Qijhet* in Amharic) into real stories.

The second is reference to informants. Often, a sentence starts with “**It has been suggested...**” Yet, there is no indication about who said what to whom and, (when an individual has been mentioned), there is no way to find out when, where, and in what context, “**it has been suggested.**” For example, in connection with the Mai Habar incident, in which, he claims, many handicapped war veterans were killed on their way to Asmara from Mai Habar (1993), he writes:

“Outraged by what happened, I had momentarily considered resigning my commission but when I heard that it was an unplanned and unfortunate incident...”(Vol. II, P 13)

Did he, therefore, find the action justifiable? Or is this yet another pragmatism in the interest of a higher cause. Needless to say, **no informant** is mentioned.

The third is a deliberate but shrewd technique of making an unsubstantiated (or even unsubstantiable) statement and then avoiding scrutiny by immediately following it up with phrases like “as I will explain later,” “will describe in another chapter”, “will relate later”, “shall return to it later”, “will explain later”. These two volumes are so riddled with such phrases that he succeeds in avoiding any critical assessment of his claims if only because in about 95% of the time, he never returned to the subjects he had left hanging in the air. Yet, when it suits him, he insists on being provided with “records”, evidence and proof (Vol. II, P 179). Thus, there is utter confusion about events that happened after his return to England, having had the decision that caused his “forced repatriation” to Ethiopia overturned in 1956. When did he attend Law School at Hull? Was he attending Law School at the University of London **at the same time**? If not, how did he manage as he claims to have received an LLB at London at the same time? When was he at the University of Perugia in Italy, where purportedly, he first got his first degree? Which one is his real *alma-mater*, London, Hull or Perugia? Information on these and other sidelined questions was “**shelved**” by “**as I will describe later**”.

This is compounded by the technique of deliberate repetition to ensure resigned acceptance of untruths, distortions and lies. Thus, the author’s *ad nauseum* proclamations that the University of London Law School was his *alma mater* since the 1950’s (due recognition is given that he received his PhD there in the 1960’s) that, *inter-alia*, he was an **academic** and a “**diplomat**” (obviously at the same time), senior member of the EPLF etc., etc. tedious and boring as they may be, are purposefully imposed on the reader to ensure unconditional acceptance. This approach is, however, yet again counterproductive since it does, in the end, compel a discriminating reader to be suspicious of the author’s motives and psychological dispositions; and such transparency of the author’s motives betrays the obsessive fantasies which force him to manipulate facts and events and to incessantly reiterate non-factual claims.

It must also be noted the pervasiveness of scores of **typo errors** and callous, even if minor, factual mistakes do, like ugly facial warts, disfigure pages after pages of the two volumes. These errors and mistakes, blame for which should be equally apportioned to both author and editor, could-and should-have been eliminated by responsible **editing** and **proof-reading**. There are simply too many of these irritants (one can easily count about thirty of such careless mistakes in the first fifty pages of the first volume) that not only do contribute to bad reading but also cast a shadow of doubt on the professionalism of the author and thus the value of the books to posterity. Incredibly, the author has thanked his “editor” in his acknowledgments.

A few glaring examples must be given for symbolic and **sentimental** reasons. “Enda Menghetti” is Albergo **Italia** and not **Roma** (Vol. II, P 19). The author could not have gone to a reception at the “**Guenete Leul**” Palace (at Sidist Kilo) which had been in 1963 turned into University by 1961. He must have been talking about the Jubilee (Iyobelieu) Palace or the Grand (Menilik) Palace (Talaqu Bete-Mengist) which was hosting on rare occasions. The legendary Seleba of Scuola Vittorio not “**Victoriao**” (this sounds Portugese, anyway) (Vol. I, P 22) may have been one armed (as the popular song about him recounts: “Seleba’lo kem Sheitan Hade Idu”) and may

have even been one legged too (as the author declares) but was still only one man and not two or more **men** (Vol. I, P 43). One of the historical figures of the Eritrean Liberation Struggles spells his name as Romodan Mohammed NUR (correctly done in Vol. II, P 5) and not NOOR (Vol. II, P 5), while it appears spelt both ways by the author. Such misleading carelessness may cost a hapless but diligent graduate student in the future some unnecessary time as he looks for two Romodans. School (Vol. I, P 20) is spelt without an “**h**” included and any person who claims to have fraternized with them should have known the spelling of President Houphuet Boigny’s (Cote D’Ivoire) (Vol. I, P 1) and Minister Mbiyu Koinange’s (Kenya) (Vol. I, P 91) and Kasavubu’s, not **Kasabubu** (Vol. I, P 87) names. In order to avoid sensitive cultural and social *faux pas*, the book should have benefitted from an earnest checking of facts and systematic proof-reading – not once but several times.

11. Conclusion

The judgment of a literary work will, needless to say, be influenced by the subjective values and preferences – even emotional attachment – to some of the characters mentioned in such work – as well as an assessment of the author’s contributions to society. Dr. Bereket Habtesellasie, as he is popularly known (or Bereket-ab as he claims the Emperor called him), will, on the basis of various objective standards, certainly have a place in Eritrean history for better and/or for worse. Whatever the case though, it will not be at the level of his unwarranted self-importance and destructively inflated ego. He had earlier written relatively good, although controversial, works on both Eritrea and Ethiopia. His records as an Ethiopian official and a member of the EPLF are not without some merits.

The memoirs, it was also hoped, would help in the removal of misconceptions about Eritrean history and the liberation struggle of its people and the country’s future place in the community of nations.

Instead, the two volumes end up being the author’s attempt at **re-inventing himself and to satisfy his fantasies**. Thus, they end up being a collection of embarrassing claims, falsehoods, sur-realistic scenarios and dialogues, old canards and distortions.

These two volumes have little or nothing to contribute to an understanding of Eritrean history. They can never be sources of any knowledge of Eritrean society. To this end, it would be essential for others to write their memoirs to compare and contrast with these works and to relate the realities of their times.

However, history will judge the memoirs harshly because future generations of Eritreans and Ethiopians, unaffected by the vicissitudes and trials and tribulations, as well as the emotional turmoil and anxiety of the times, will find that the books offer little – if any – relevant and more importantly, **reliable**, information that will enable them to have a good understanding of the earlier generation’s society. In addition, his contemporaries (at least those that are alive) will

certainly brush him aside as an uncouth transgressor of numerous ethical standards and rules of writing.

More damning will be his betrayal of trust of the Eritrean people. He writes:

“The Constitution was not written to the specification of the EPLF though it (renamed PFDJ in 1994) was duly consulted on a number of issues as a governing party and therefore a legitimate stakeholder” (Vol. II, P 116), and “a governing party has every right to be consulted but that it is different from such a party or the government dictating to the Constitution drafting entity. The autonomy of the CCE was never compromised at any time during the three years period of constitutional consultation” (Vol. II, P 116), and “As a document drafted with wide popular consultation, the Eritrean Constitution is generally regarded as belonging to the people” (Vol. II, P 125), and “Indeed as mentioned before, a major reason for popular participation is to instill a sense of ownership to the people.” (Vol. II, P 125)

These are noble words; these are brave words and these are eloquent words. However, they ring hollow and he knows they are false. Many people have already spoken of a betrayal. We hope that some will begin now to confirm or reject our charges. We also hope that he will come clean with the Eritrean people because history has a way of revealing the truth, as he himself repeatedly declares. He himself insists that “A liar or simulator easily forgets facts and contexts and the truth has a way of emerging, to dispute and discredit the lie” (Vol. II, P 186). We agree wholeheartedly and so we advise that there is no longer any room for **pragmatism in the interest of a higher cause.**