

Book Review and Commentary

Asgede Gebre Selassie, GAHDI 1, Signature Book Printing, 2007. Pages 240. \$20.00

By Tecola Worq Hagos



I. Introduction

This is one book that I wish I read years back, even before its printing date, for the content of the book is exceptionally important and relevant for any degree of understanding of the political and military saga in the recent history of Ethiopia. The author, Asgede Gebre Selassie [hereafter "Asgede"] has done as a great favor by writing and publishing this book, *Gahdi 1* [hereafter "Gahdi"]. *Gahdi* is the first installment of six books, and already *Gahdi II* and *Gahdi III* are in print and are scheduled for translation into Amharic. Any book review ought to be in the language read by the reviewer. In that case, this review and commentary should have been in Amharic. I am making an exception for the book *Gahdi 1* because it is an extremely important book and should be read by every Ethiopian, and I chose to review it in English for maximum reach. There are two main reasons that I find the book highly relevant: 1) to advance a political democratic system, and 2) to galvanize our economic system in what ever form it might be.

The importance of the book is not for its literary beauty or eye-popping drama, but for more important pursuit of truth and understanding of the events that shaped and continue to shape our current Ethiopian political and economic life. In essence, this book is a record of the day to day dairy of a warrior, which was compiled later in a readable narrative form. Asgede included also a brief autobiography at the end of the book that helps his readers to place him in the historic sequences that shaped us all as Ethiopians of the Generation that came to its own in the 1960s and 1970s. Asgede was one of the eleven original founders of the TPLF. He served as the first trainer of the TPLF fighters and held important logistic and operation posts. [pp234-239] The position he held is comparable to that of a "Colonel" where he is right in the middle of command and control exchange central and indispensable coordinating midlevel position.

I compare *Gahdi I* with the great *Anabasis* by Xenophon [*Anabasis*, trams. by C.L. Brownson, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press 1922, rev. 1989], or to the war dairies of Julius Caesar, [*The Galic War*, trams. H. J. Edwards, (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1917)]. Another memorable war narrative is that of Ulysses S. Grant's memoirs, [*Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, (Charles L. Webster & Company, 1886)]. The modern version of a narrative of war expedition is portrayed

by Norman Schwarzkopf, the General who led the first Iraq war, [*It Doesn't Take a Hero: The Autobiography of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf* (Bantam, 1993)]. Of all the great narrators on war I read, Asgede reminds me of Xenophon and his *Anabasis*, for its bluntness and pragmatism in the survival of an army constantly under attack from all sides. War stories build character, I strongly recommend young Ethiopians to read the lives of great war heroes especially Xenophon's *Anabasis* and Asgede's *Gahdi 1*.

The book by Asgede is a result of compilation of notes taken contemporaneous to the events described or evaluated. This book is direct and at ground level where the action took place in the vast war theatre of the northern half of Ethiopia that included Eritrea. I did not find Asgede having any other motive other than telling the truth as he saw and participated in it. *Gahdi 1* is essentially a soldier's story albeit a soldier with prodigious memory. I did not discern any effort in Asgede's narrative to varnish the truth to fit a particular political agenda. It is a book written by extremely courageous warrior to set the record straight, a record that needed to be straightened because the true events of that terrible rebellion and war and devastation had been doctored and deformed by the political propaganda machineries of TPLF and EPLF. The reason for my trust of the narrative of Asgede is the fact that it was done at the time the event took place. Of course, there are opportunities to doctor facts when compiling raw data into a coherent book narrative. I do not think such is the situation in this particular case.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters, and follows a timeline roughly from the 1974 to 2005. This makes it easy to follow the narrative. Since the book is based on contemporaneous notes taken by a warrior, it has a feel of the battle field and that of the life of a soldier. The language is not polished, but direct and simple. I can understand its stoic veneer, for I met the author and had an impression of a person who is simple and honest. I spent a couple of hours learning about Asgede and his role in the wars of liberation from the Derg's death-grip. I found out about Asgede a lot more than what I asked for. Asgede is very different than most of the ex-members of TPLF who had been pushed out by Meles Zenawi and his inner circle for a number of reasons. Asgede is not burning for revenge or to get even with anybody.

Asgede's concern is the truth of the great deeds of his comrades who fought and died winning the battle for freedom without any other hidden agenda for power or wealth. In this he included even political groups against whom he fought the EPRP and EDU paying them tribute and respect for their stand on the issue of Eritrea's claim for independence and its separateness from Ethiopia where by both EPRP and EDU, along with Meison as invited guests, declined to endorse what EPLF was claiming at the first EPLF Conference in *Nehase* 1969 [EC]. [pp57-58] By contrast TPLF representative, Abay Tsehai, read a Statement from the TPLF Leadership fully endorsing the claims of EPLF. [p58] That was the beginning of the EPLF move toward the TPLF abandoning EPRP. I trust Asgede more than any apologetic ex-TPLF Member or current official of EPRDF and those of the EPLF et cetera.

II. On the Leadership of TPLF

In *Gahdi 1* it is clearly established that the nascent leadership of the TPLF, before Meles Zenawi became the moving force of that political organization, individuals who played crucial roles in the anti-Ethiopia policy and program were Abayi Tsehai, Seyoum Mesfin, and Sebhat Nega. In reading Asgede's book, I was left with the impression of Aregawi Berhe, the prominent founding Member of the TPLF, as an inert figure in the book narrative, because he is portrayed by Asgede as a functionary with limited capacity for original thinking or policy initiation. Although Aregawi was the commander of the TPLF fighters, Asgede's narrative does not say much about Aregawi as a leader except to mention his presence in this or that meetings.

I know Aregawi for some time now, and I have a different impression of him as an engaging, polite and knowledgeable individual with sincere concern to fix what he might have broken during his TPLF leadership era that ended in 1985. Asgede's account of events led me to believe that Aregawi seems to have been outmaneuvered completely into becoming a work-horse as field operator of the policies of the TPLF initiated by Abayi Tsehai, Sebhat Nega, and later by Meles Zenawi. From the book, the most villainous individuals seem to be Abayi Tsehai followed by Meles Zenawi, Sebhat Nega and Seyoum Mesfin, who seem to be involved in the anti-Ethiopia indoctrination scheme of TPLF fighters and Party policy initiation and collaboration with EPLF to the detriment of Ethiopia. I also believe that at that time Aregawi seemed to share with TPLF's leaders sentiment of anti-Ethiopia rather than being anti-feudal order of Emperor Haile Selassie. Even though Aregawi had asserted the fact that his disagreement with Sebhat Nega started due to his support of Ethiopian unity, he did participate in all major battles TPLF engaged the Ethiopian forces from 1975 to 1985. At any rate, he did not do much to maintain his power in the TPLF and had to run for his life at the end. He had recanted as much now.

According to Asgede's narrative of the command structure of the TPLF, during the second phase of the political struggle within the TPLF, those who helped propel Meles into power were also involved in some form of anti-Ethiopia policies in a hate/love collaborative stance with EPLF, and such individuals included Arkebe Oqubay, Gebru Asrat, Seye Abraha, Tsadkan G/Tensie, et cetera. Asgede's documentation is highly informative and enlightening on the transition phase from the influence of the original Central Committee Members to the more radicalized and rigidly hierarchical elitist leadership of Meles Zenawi and close associates that included Sebhat Nega and Abayi Tsehai, from 1985 on. Much discussion and in depth study need be undertaken by serious Ethiopian scholars, by people who have understood the historic forces at work, in order to have a clear picture of what exactly happened in those trying days. The Diaspora Mengistu's men like Kassa Kebede, Girma Bekele, et cetera should not be allowed to use such honest self examination processes to promote their racist and narrow ethnicist poison darts, for they are always using patriotic Ethiopians to hide their crimes and their narrow ethnicism and always using divisive rhetoric in support of their barbaric master,

Mengistu Hailemariam.

Although Asgede did not address the finance of the TPLF in depth, it seems from the scanty information on the finance of the TPLF provided in his book that the TPLF's purse was controlled by Meles Zenawi, Sebhat Nega, and Seyoum Mesfin. After the 1984 famine and massive international assistance, there seems to be far more recruitment and training of young fighters resulting at one point over seventy thousand fighters. It is not difficult to imagine that there must have been some infusion of money from donor nations that was diverted from humanitarian goals to training TPLF fighters. This is collaborated by very many articles and also by records of individuals who were actually involved in the finance of the TPLF and who were involved in the accounting processes of the funds and donations that was pouring in to the coiffeur of the TPLF. Not only millions of dollars were put into the hands of TPLF leaders but also hundreds of thousands of tons of cereal and prepared food items were made available for distribution and for sale to the public in the Sudan.

III. The Sacrifice of the People of Tigray

More than any ethnic group of Ethiopians, the people of Tigray have paid with their lives dearly during the violent reign of terror of Mengistu Hailemariam for over fifteen years. The Derg military operations in the northerner half of the nation and the devastation of natural disaster, which truly never was under control since 1974, took its toll resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans in Tigray and also in Eritrea, Gondar, and North Wollo. Mengistu's brutal Government unleashed a wave of genocidal massacre in Tigray. It is ironic that we hear and read about "genocidal Meles Zenawi" whose crime is absolutely *less* compared to the hundreds of thousands of murdered and brutalized Ethiopian Citizens by Mengistu Hailemariam. [I used the term "minuscule" rather than "less" for the purpose of hyperbole, but in so doing I seem to have understated the criminal activities of Meles Zenawi. And that was not my intention. I credit Abraha Belai of Ethiomedia for pointing out that clerical error.]

Asgede in minute details has shown how EPLF had committed some of the worst crimes next to Mengistu against the people of Tigray especially in time of their greatest needs. For example, in 1984 because EPLF refused to allow Tigrayan refugees to pass through Tesseney area seeking help in Sudan when they were only about five kilometers from their destination and forced to go back, tens of thousands of Tigrayans perished due to Derg bombings, hunger, and pestilence. Asgede claims that not only the EPLF refused free passage for humanitarian reason but also it is alleged to have provided information to reach the Derg Military command as to the whereabouts of the refugees whereby they were attacked by helicopters and Migs that rained bombs on the refugees. [pp139-141]

In May of 1998 Eritrean forces crossed over in the Badema area to attack lightly armed Ethiopian garrison soldiers and moved into Ethiopia about three heavily armed brigades of 3000. In June a month later, Eritrea bombed Mekele, and that attack was on civilian population including an elementary school where 52 children and civilian

adults were murdered and over 130 were wounded. EPLF has committed innumerable crimes against unarmed innocent Tigrayans living in Eritrea. The despicable treatments of the soldiers of the disintegrating Ethiopian Army with unheard of vicious attacks, executions, and torture by EPLF, warrant charges of war crimes against the leadership of EPLF, especially Issayas Afewerki and his Military Commanders who should be tried in the local Courts of any of the signatory countries of the 1948 Genocide Convention, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Asgede asserted that EPLF started preparation for war more than three or four years ago before its attack of Bademe in 1998. Just after the demise of the Derg, the EPLF was engaged in massive building of storage facilities in order to stockpile millions of quintals of Teff and Dagusa.[p197] EPLF's military preparedness was also on high alert and massive training was undertaken. [p203] All these factors were reported by Asgede and other concerned TPLF Members to the leadership of TPLF including the Ethiopian Ambassador Awalom in Asmara who was at that time the eyes and ears for Meles Zenawi. Asgede also claims that he had informed Gebru Asrat, who was the Governor of the State of Tigray at that time, about the readiness of EPLF to attack Ethiopia. Gebru Asrat seems to have heeded what was confided to him, for he was one of the five Politburo Members who challenged the reluctance of the group led by Meles Zenawi to prepare for any attack by EPLF.

The Ethiopian Government Officials simply dismissed all the warnings and information and further labeled the information as narrow-minded warmongering and disparaged the individuals so concerned and reporting about the buildup for war by EPLF. [pp197-199] However, the issue of such possible attack by EPLF finally got the ears of a divided Politburo of the TPLF's Central Committee. The Politburo debated the issue whether Eritrea would attack Ethiopia, for sometime and because of escalating concerns by prominent members of the TPLF a formal hearing was started. In fact, there was some speculation that some of the Leaders (in the Politburo of the Central Committee of the TPLF) were agents of the EPLF. The one great obstacle against the alert and the preparation for any attack from EPLF was none other than Meles Zenawi. [p201]

The Ethiopian public was never properly informed about the war mongering of Eritrea and its preparations. The Ethiopian public was still considered as the "enemy" of the TPLF and the Leaders were evasive and totally apprehensive of the Ethiopian Public. Asgede rightly pointed out the fact that Meles Zenawi was informed by the Ethiopian Military intelligence, by TPLF's own security personnel and officials and by others. But Meles Zenawi refused to acknowledge the immensity and immediacy of the problem. He took the most unreasonable stand wherein he claimed that such prediction of attack by EPLF was propaganda piece of the opposition to EPRDF's government. But momentum for serious consideration of the threat was gaining speed, and became too controversial an issue to ignore when EPLF troop movement could not be hidden any more.

The group in favor of getting ready for war was having a favorable vote until Seye

Abraha switched his initial position and casted the deciding vote with those of Meles Zenawi, Sebhat Nega, Seyoum Mesfin defeating the position for getting prepared for possible attack by EPLF. The view on getting prepared for an attack by EPLF was championed by Gebru Asrat, Tewolde Woldemariam. [pp205-6] This also explained to me the rumor that I heard that there was some kind of smoldering feud between Seye Abraha and Gebru Asrat. However, Seye changed his mind again in time to prepare the defense of Ethiopia. [p207] Seye did one great job leading the War against EPLF's adventurism that drained the resources of the people, with the death of over one hundred thousand soldiers.

IV. Myth of EPLF and its Fighters

The most exaggerated claims of EPLF are its portrayal of its role as the big-brother to the TPLF and the many alleged decisive roles played by its fighters in all major engagements that took place in Sahil, Afabet, Nakfa, and at the Battles of Share against the Third Revolutionary Army (TRA) with its main force, the Army Corp 604. According to Asgede, the number of EPLF Members who fought supporting the TPLF was very negligible. In fact, Asgede provides us with detailed statements and tables that itemize the form and amount of material assistance, and the number of TPLF and EPLF combatants, and the names of commanders, who were in the many battlefields leading TPLF fighters. [p177ff]

One very dramatic and very contradictory information on the issue of battlefield claims deals with the Battles of Share against the Third Revolutionary Army (TRA) in 1989. According to Asgede, less than fifty combatants (artillery) participated in that war theater where more than thirty thousand seasoned fighters of the TRA, with additional support of thousands of mechanized and specialized divisions of the Ethiopian Armed Forces, fought against tens of thousands of TPLF fighters over a period of almost two years (1989-1990).[p149-157] However, Aregawi Berhe in his book asserted that there were two mechanized brigades (long range artillery) that were decisive and who helped the TPLF turn the tide of victory against the TRA. [Aregawi Berhe, *A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975-1991)*, Tsehai Publishers, 2009, page 260.] Aregawi by then was already pushed out of the TPLF and living in exile. Aregawi cited for that assertion Gebru Tareke and John Young, individuals who were not either on the battle field or privy to original documentation. [See Gebru Tareke, "From Af Abet to Shire: the defeat of and demise of Ethiopia's 'Red' Army 1988-89," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42(2), (2004); John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991*, Cambridge University Press (1997).]

Historians and all those who write about wars and political struggles should be very careful in the way they take and use information provided by interested parties such as commanders, political leaders et cetera. The two Authors, Gebru Tareke and John Young, seem to have built their account on the basis of interviews with leaders who have vested interest in claiming heroic participations in famous wars and casting their narration in pursuit of political goals. Asgede, on the other hand, was on the field of

operation participating in both logistics and battle operations and his record of events he witnessed recorded contemporaneously with the events. It is possible also Asgede only recorded aspects of the battle field that he was directly involved in and not all of the many engagements fought over a vast area.

It is often claimed by opposition groups and the general public that EPLF was the main player responsible for the defeat of Mengistu Hailemariam and that helped TPLF fighters to overrun Mengistu's Army and enter Addis Ababa in triumph. The fact is far from such exaggerated claims, for the numbers of EPLF fighters who were embedded in the TPLF's expeditionary forces that entered Addis Ababa were not even one hundred distributed in different TPLF fighting unites, hardly of any significance. [pp159-163] Those EPLF members were joined by EPLF security personnel. The TPLF had already mobilized over 65,000 fighters when it started the insurrection into territories under the control of Mengistu's forces by 1986. The EPLF force did not exceed even ten thousand before 1989 decisive destruction of the TRA in Shere. It is after the battle of Shere that EPLF started to have tremendous numbers of new fighters enlisting in its swelling forces.

What is most puzzling to me is the fact that why TPLF that was well organized, had superior manpower and weapon by the 1980s remained in some kind of subservient relations with EPLF's Leadership. TPLF could have taken out EPLF as it did ELF any time during the early 1980s. EPLF had less than 8,000 troops in Eritrea, while the TPLF had twice that many and over ten thousand in Eritrea Sahil area. Is this a fact of diminished ambition, or may be inexplicable hate for the rest of Ethiopia and as a result no interest in succeeding to rule over a vast Ethiopia? Very often I hear friends in discourses and I also read in articles that Issayas Afeworki missed a golden opportunity to be the leader for all of Ethiopia. How could he be? He did not have the military power at that time in 1991 to challenge the TPLF. Had he challenged the TPLF he would have lost his control of Eritrea. Asgede's book makes this abundantly clear.

I realize now that Meles Zenawi and Sebat Nega were after all telling the truth when they asserted in several interviews, over and over, that they fought for the independence of Eritrea more than the EPLF or the Eritreans themselves did for their independence. It seems that Eritrea was a gift given by the TPLF to Issayas Afeworki and his EPLF Members. It defies reason why that happened. And I am still searching for some rational for the most vexing behavior of Meles Zenawi, Sebat Nega, Abayi Tsehai, Seyoum Mesfin and all those human barracudas that have attached themselves with Meles Zenawi. I need to know what exactly happened in such exclusive meetings or connections between Meles Zenawi and Issayas Afeworki. I have this sickening anxiety that Meles Zenawi and Issayas Afeworki are on the same page, and simply staging a simulation a fight waiting for the right moment to bring out all kinds of agreements that totally would undermine the interest of Ethiopia.

Asgede is truly a man of the people. It is remarkable that he always made the subtle distinction between nationalism and associative identity with a particular political party or organization. Through out the book he made a distinction between the

“Eritrean” people and the EPLF. He restrained himself from making huge sweeping generalization about the activities of the EPLF as if such acts are the deeds of the People of Eritrea. He went further than most Diaspora politicians, for example, in his appreciation of those Eritreans who risked their lives and imprisonment by helping Ethiopians caught in the crossfire in the fight for power between the TPLF and EPLF leaders. However, Asgede did not hash but gave graphic and often painful descriptions how civilian Ethiopians were persecuted, murdered, tortured, and brutally treated by EPLF at different times in territories controlled by EPLF throughout the struggle to overthrow the yoke of oppression of Mengistu Hailemariam and his regime.

V. Lessons for Ethiopians

This is a crucial time for most Ethiopians both in the Motherland and in the Diaspora. Both our liberation and the healing of our spiritual lives may start with our facing the most unpleasant truth of our recent history starting from 1965 to date. Mengistu Hailemariam committed genocidal murders in Tigray and Eritrea, and countless assassinations and public executions of students, civilians from all walks of life (not even sparing religious leaders); he unleashed a reign of terror unheard of in Ethiopia’s long history, for eighteen years devastating the national economy and social life. Thus, all those who were associated with Mengistu at high policy level relationships should never be involved in any capacity in our Diaspora political opposition. There are many individuals whose hands are drenched with the blood of their innocent victims. Such criminals are hiding all over the Free World, in the United States, Britain, France, Germany et cetera. It is often the case that such criminals often times may be part of opposition groups in clandestine or open activities of agitation and despoiling the names and reputations of those who challenge them, continuing their “Red Terror” activities from the era of the dictatorship of Mengistu Hailemariam. Some even have the absurd idea to reinstate the criminal Mengistu Hailemariam back in power.

The former leaders of the TPLF and affiliated political organizations who have either formed a political organization or joined an existing “Opposition” Party have apologized recanting some of their mistakes committed as officials of the TPLF/EPRDF controlled Ethiopian Government. What I have heard and what I have read about the rehabilitation of such former officials of TPLF/ERDF is not sufficient at all. We need to hear a lot more about the types of relationship that existed to lead us into the current dismal political and economic situation of Ethiopia. They should never pursue political power in any form. They should spent the rest of their lives on their knees asking forgiveness from the People of Tigray first and foremost for the great crime committed by TPLF on tens of thousands of Tigrayans and ask forgiveness with as much remorse and contrition from Ethiopians in general..

Even though I admire the courage of Asgede in writing *Gahdi 1* and that I am grateful for the opportunity to talk with him, nevertheless, I am highly critical of the jubilation one reads in *Gahdi 1*, especially in his narratives of the winning of battles by TPLF in

Shere 1989. He seems to forget that the Ethiopian soldiers who were dying in tens of thousands were no less heroic than the fighters of the TPLF or the EPLF, for a number of them were fighting to defend our Homeland. Most are not mercenaries, and most were forced to fight by a regime that brutalized their parents and the general Ethiopian public. It is a mistake by anyone in the TPLF or EPLF to think of the Ethiopian soldier as an individual that lacks courage and fighting spirit. He is no pushover, and has if not more the type of courage admired by Asgede in the fighters of the TPLF.

What destroyed the Ethiopian Revolutionary Army is the person of Mengistu Hailemariam, a usurper and brutal leader who did not have anything in common with the soldiers he was sending to the battlefield. Mengistu was a small ordinance storehouse keeper before he was sent as a representative of a rebellious military unit from Harrar. He manipulated the situation and climbed to the summit of power, and later caused havoc decimating the command structure of the Ethiopian Army resulting in its defeat and disintegration in May of 1991 when EPRDF took over power..

However, it is true that the leaders of the TPLF did not mistreat war prisoners nor desecrate the remains of soldiers who died in battle. By contrast EPLF committed some of the most heinous and despicable criminal acts against soldiers that surrendered. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 covers also the behavior of winning belligerents. EPLF has still to account for thousands of war prisoners. Another criticism that is often leveled against the TPLF/EPRDF is the deportation of tens of thousands of Eritreans from Ethiopia to Eritrea. Asgede has given us a far more accurate picture of the situation leading up to the implementation of that policy to deport Eritreans from Ethiopia. It is absolutely clear from the Book that most of the deportee were engaged in anti-Ethiopia activities looting, money laundering, and in subversive activities to create conflicts between the members of the EPRDF and also instigating one ethnic group against others especially the OLF. [p201]

It defies both common sense and logic for the leaderships of Ginbot 7, OLF, and the *Kefagn* Patriot Front to have any dealings with EPLF. It is absolutely well established by Asgede in his book that Issayas Afeworki and his EPLF are the most unreliable partners that one can have. It is evident from the number of times the EPLF changed its political position and policy with TPLF and the number of times it sued for peace and negotiated settlement with the Government of Mengistu Hailemariam that the Leadership of the EPLF must not be trusted. It has even deserted or betrayed long time friendship from one group to another in the Middle East. It had and continues to have armed conflicts with all of the nations that share borders with it. Thus, no one ought to trusts Issayas Afeworki on any issue. The question of support to the Ethiopian Opposition by the Government of Issayas Afeworki ought to be rejected at every turn because the motive and goals of EPLF has been the disintegration of Ethiopia. Such short term and hateful approach is like murdering ones own parents. With the disintegration of Ethiopia no one in the vivificated enclaves out of Ethiopia or in Eritrea either is going to gain anything. One must not lose sight of the fact that

Eritrea has no constitution and no ruling Central Committee: it is all a one man show.

I should emphasize here lest I mislead you to think that Asgede is against “Eritreans” per se, for Asgede did express strongly felt contempt against the reckless and often times savage and brutal activities of EPLF and its leaders toward the People of Ethiopia in general and that of Tigray in particular. [pp191-195] The way I look at the complex psychological make-up of “Eritreans” is that they suffer from inferiority complex and as a result exaggerate some aspects of their lives through fallacious identification with the civilization of their former colonial masters, the Italians. The sixty years colonial period under a brutal colonial power must have left deep scars in the psyche of the Population most associated with the Italian colonizers especially in Asmara and the people from Hamassein. And all the past and current erratic behavior of Issayas Afeworki (who is from Tselot (a small village near Asmara), Hamasien; some claim from Akale Guzai) and close associates is due to that fractured and deformed identity. We often see in the behavior of people who were in similar conditions of servitude and exposure to Western civilization through colonialism and indentured servitude. Even most of those “Blacks” whose ancestors were slaves brought from Africa (mostly West Africa) to the New World display similarly distorted personality after gaining their freedom. The exceptions to that general statement are Indians. There is nothing to be proud of being a subject or slave of any master.

VI. The Masterpiece “Chapter Fifteen” and Conclusion

Obviously, Asgede is at his best in his analysis and fact findings of the conflict between EPLF and TPLF that eventually lead to the all out war of 1998-1999 between Ethiopia and Eritrea. [Chapter XVI pp190-228] He provides us with some valuable information that may be used to do further research to start all kinds of serious work on the history of our Nation. Needless to say Chapter Fifteen is also a summation. He took a clear stand on the question of Ethiopia being landlocked. He did not spare the Leaders of the TPLF for being responsible for that unjust and ahistorical outcome of the destruction of Mengistu Hailemariam’s Government. I believe Asgede’s analysis of the stupendous layer of interests and forces that shaped that outcome is unmatched by any I have read since the corrupt decision of the Boundary Commission was rendered in 2002.

There is much to be learned from Asgede’s first book, and I am also sure there is a lot more coming from the same fountain of information. I look forward to reading more of Asgede’s work. So far I am not at all disappointed, but overwhelmed with the complexity and the meandering political history of the last thirty years that a warrior untangled for me and for all of us. I have heard from third parties that some people including some who were in leadership position in the TPLF and some who are still in power in Ethiopia, as well as, in Eritrea (and in few instances directly) that they think of Asgede’s book as exaggerated. But I have not read of anyone challenging him directly offering a version of truth that is in contradiction to that of what Asgede wrote.

I trust Asgede to tell the truth and would never distort the truth to promote his own

self interest or that of any other group against the truth as he knows it. There is much to be trusted appreciated in this man. Why would a family man with five children and a Wife and extended family would risk all in the service of “truth” and his fellow Ethiopians unless moved to his very soul with a burning desire to bring some degree of closure to a distorted and corrupted reality. If there are errors in Asgede’s factual findings or recording of facts, they are just mistakes not deliberate distortions to hide or propagate.

Asgede’s last call to Ethiopians is a modest one. He is not propagating some Heavenly future for Ethiopia, or the destruction of some enemy. He is concerned with the sanity and political and economic health of the people of Ethiopia. He admonishes us to seek the truth, and he believes that it is with the narration of the truth that the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea would forge a close relationship. There is no doubt in my mind that Asgede’s book will stand the test of time and would greatly enrich our understanding of the truth.. At the very least he had opened our eyes to the many facts that would have been lost in the confusion of our time.

The thoughts of Asgede mostly reflect his noble hopes and aspirations untainted with personal desire for political power. I believe Asgede has a modest goal, one aimed to share his experience and straighten distorted historical events reported or propagated by political groups promoting their own selfish goals. In the mean time, it left me with a bad aftertaste for politics. I realized how very little I knew the people I eagerly joined in 1991 even though I realized soon enough that my aspirations for Ethiopia was quite different that of the leadership. How ignorant and stupid my views might have sounded with the puppet-masters of our Ethiopian political lives. I was talking about Ethiopian unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and morality, which might have sounded crude, uninitiated, and naïve to Meles Zenawi and his close associates. To close the matter on that score, I will state one more time here that I was indeed in the Ethiopian Transitional Government actively engaged from May 1991 to May 1992 and left the country in July of 1993. I have never handled anything that has to do with Eritrea, or the drafting of the 1995 Constitution, nor caused the firing of “Amharas” as stated by a couple of idiotic bloggers. How could I, for half my relations and ancestors are “Amharas” from the very foundation of Shoa’s aristocracy, Efrata and Menz. I have supported the Ethiopian cause not just in words but also in deeds, for example, I am one of those who supported the independent management and increase funding of the Ethiopian Airlines in order to expand it against the muted hostility by Meles Zenawi and Kassu Illala toward that marvelous Airlines, symbol of success and independence; I even negotiated for the Airlines a multimillion refinancing in 1992 in New York City, and got them a great deal.

Many Ethiopians have died and even more have suffered tremendous pain and deprivations during the last thirty years. Most of our problems would have been solved wisely and peacefully had the society been vigilant and censored unfit psychopathic individuals like Mengistu Hailemariam from becoming leaders. Ethiopians have experienced the brutality of leaders from the lowest in office to the head of states in successive governments. Asgede has written a highly personal

account of an extremely painful and difficult war story. I have no doubt that Asgede, as a person, has learned as much as he is teaching us of the singular courage of individuals facing overwhelming adversities and living to see better days that Ethiopia is a single nation that includes the break-away “nation” of Eritrea.

I applaud Asgede for his most informative Book, and I greatly admire his courage and his fortitude and patriotism in writing truthful account of the bravery and suffering of the Ethiopian people of tremendous courage and persistence through out human history. I urge Ethiopians from all walks of life to read *Gahdi 1* and the follow-up volumes as they come to be available. Asgede, brave warrior of Ethiopia, well done and thank you!

Tecola Worq Hagos

Washington DC

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