

MARTYR AND HERO “HAMID IDRIS AWATE”

THE FATHER OF THE ERITREAN ARMED STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION FOR INDEPENDENCE AND LIBERATION



Profile of the national symbol and icon Hamid Awate

Full name: Hamid Idris Awate Faidom Faid Muhammad Idris Abu Aakka.

Date of birth: 1910 - 1962 (28 May 1962) – lived about 52 years.

Place of birth: Garsat village (between Tessenei and Oum Hajer – south west Eritrea)

Awate Offsprings: Doctor Karrar Hamid Awate (graduated from Syria).

Physical characteristics: body: slim, height: 1.65 meters (medium stature), eye and hair color: black, skin color: light wheaten-colored with a visible scar between his index finger and thumb in one of his hands and with three lines of facial scarring (Shiloukh) on each cheek.

Languages spoken: Tigre, Arabic, Nara, Hedarab, Kunama, Tigrinya and Italian. Awate was multilingual and familiar with all Eritrean cultures and most of its languages and dialects.

Personal traits: He was taciturn (man of few words), tactful, visionary (acting with the end in mind), leader, man of integrity, courageous, charismatic (men who met him loved him and often told tales of his greatness), multilingual, “walked his talk” (practiced what he preached), intelligent, simple, nationalist, dignified, honest and magnanimous.



Doctor Karrar Hamid Awate

All the quotations mentioned in this article are collected from an Arabic book titled: “Awate his life and heroism” written by Engineer Suleiman Faid and from interviews and narrations of Awate companions of the first generation of fighters who accompanied him.

The following “quotations” by martyr Awate illustrate and reflect his greatness and nationalism.

(In a meeting held by the leader Awate addressing the heroic Eritrean Liberation Army)

"We are all Eritreans and we have to serve our country and people with honesty and sincerity. We are here to achieve a goal, and if there is anybody who has individual ambitions other than the declared objective, then, he must leave now. We all have to show extreme commitment and dedication and carry out the commands and instructions of the leader, no matter how hard they are, for the cause of our country."

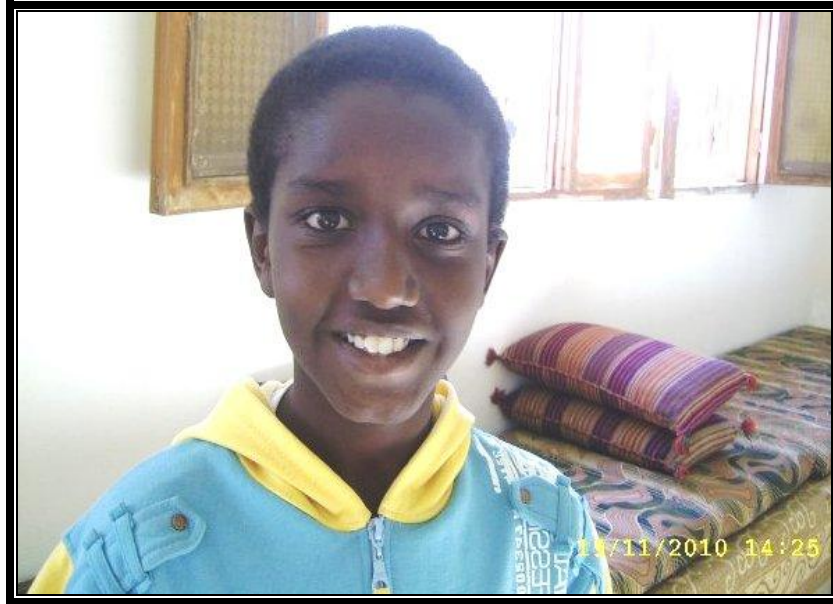
As narrated by the fighter Humed Hassen Idris Dohen, who was one of the first generation of fighters and attended the meeting that evening, where Awate addressed the fighters by saying:

"Today we are here to fight the enemy, not only because they humiliated and usurped our land, but to write a proud and honorable history for Eritrea. We are here to challenge the occupation authorities with all their weapons and armies and tell them that we will not accept after this day the life of humiliation and disgrace. We are determined, supported by all the great Eritrean people, to move forward on the path of struggle and martyrdom until liberation "

"If we want to save our country, regain our honor and attain our goals, we have to pursue one way only and it is the path of armed struggle. Without the armed struggle it's impossible to recover, repossess and regain any of our rights."

"We must fight injustice and oppressors in all possible and various ways?"

"The announcement of armed revolution is not an end by itself, but its continuation is essential to yield the desired result (liberation of Eritrea from Ethiopian occupation)."



Hamid Karrar Hamid Awate

Family background: Awate originates from a dignified and honorable Eritrean family well respected in their village and the whole region around them. They were pious Muslim family who lived in peace a decent life with their people in the village. His father was a peasant and the young Awate learned a lot of things from him and was strongly influenced by him. He became skilful at the use of arms at an early age and learned the oral history of Eritrea as narrated to him by his father. Awate inherited from his father and his environment high moral standards and the culture of chivalry, bravery, honesty and magnanimity which gained him great respect by the people around him. He was a principled man of high morals and acted seriously and responsibly in regards to his people and country, due to his upbringing and education.

Italian era (1890 -1941): The Italian colonization of Eritrea was marked with the highest possible exploitation of Eritrean people and land by the Italians. The Eritrean youth were forcibly conscripted to serve in the Italian army and were used as “fuels” to protect the Italian occupation and to conquer new land for the colonizers. The young Awate in 1935 was conscripted to serve in the Italian colonial army as was customary at that time thousands of Eritreans were forced to join the Italian army. Awate was a sagacious, astute

and acumen person, multilingual (commanded most Eritrean languages) and in a very short time learned the Italian language. His excellence and prominence among his peers became apparent, which gained him respect and admiration by his superiors in the army. He was chosen among the best soldieries to go to Italy for training in military intelligence for one year.

After Awate return from Italy (Rome) in 1938, he enthusiastically formed a clandestine cell to oppose the Italian occupation of Eritrea. The resistance cell was formed from Eritrean soldiers who returned from Italy after their training there. After his return from Italy he served at several posts (amongst them in Adebara border post near Sudan) and after the end of World War II, he left the Italian army and went back to his village to live a simple and decent life with his people and family.

British era (1941- 1952): After the defeat of the Italians (in World War II) Eritrea became a protectorate under the British Military Administration (BMA) until its future to be decided by the United nations (UN) and the British army started exerting their authority to all regions of Eritrea. It was a well known fact that Awate was local as well as regional “hero” and he was defending his people against attacks by the “Shiftas” coming from the Sudan, Ethiopia or parts of Eritrea who were looting and causing severe damages to the people of his region. His heroic defense and fight against the “shiftas” was pronounced and greatly anticipated and counted upon, because all the people expected his help and his protection. When the British army was searching for arms in the region, they confiscated properties, killed cattle and terrorized the local people in order to exert their authority. The behavior of the British soldiers angered the brave Awate who attacked them and killed one of their soldiers. Since that period, the relationship between Awate and the BMA was tense. They labeled him as criminal and he was living as fugitive who refused and opposed the British presence and occupation of Eritrea.

The British when discovered that Awate can cause severe damage to them, they tried to accommodate and make peace or treaty with him but failed. Awate never acknowledged

and accepted the BMA domination and behavior against the Eritrean people and their land. During the BMA period Awate was closely monitoring the political situation in Eritrea and had contacts with several Eritrean key personalities and his opposition and rejection of the British presence in Eritrea was clear.

Ethiopian era: The Ethiopian occupation tried all possible means to stop the armed struggle from its birth and even before its declaration. They sent delegates to ask Awate to give up arms, promised Awate to grant high posts and money and all possible incentives. But it was fruitless because the martyr and hero Awate decided to wage a “revolution” by the use of arms. It became apparent and very clear to him the Ethiopian intentions were to occupy and enslave Eritrean people and Ethiopian policy was to kill “all the Eritrean people” if it was necessary to achieve their goals (they were interested in Eritrean land and sea and not its people). However; the Ethiopian occupation authorities were not hopeless from their attempts to persuade Awate to reverse his opinion and to lay down arms and return to his village. Thus, they sent him a large delegation of dignitaries from the region in this regard. His response was decisive when he told the delegation:

"Tell to those who sent you to modify and alter their opinion regarding the occupation of Eritrea. We will not retreat from the goal that the Eritrean people have chosen and announced by declaring the armed struggle. We are not bandits and war amateurs, but we demand freedom and we will endure all the difficulties for the sake to liberate the homeland."

Thus, the armed struggle for dignity and freedom was declared on 1st of September 1961 to mark one of the most significant dates in Eritrean history.

Declaration of Eritrean Armed Struggle for Freedom and Independence by the leader Awate and his thirteen brave companions.

The leader and hero Awate with his thirteen brave companions on the 1st of September 1961, at nine o'clock in the morning, led the first battle against the Ethiopian occupation forces in mount Adal. Here the first shots were fired to declare the birth of Eritrean

people's armed struggle for independence and freedom. 01/09/1961 corresponding to: Friday 20 Raby` al-awal 1381 A.H.

Awate said to his companions:

"Today the *azzanit* (meaning the rifle) was pronounced and the last link has been cut off between us and the occupier; from today onwards there is no rest or sleep"

Our modern political history started as peaceful and political struggle and when it was discovered that it was futile, in vain and fruitless, the Eritrean people resorted to armed struggle to demand for their legitimate rights for liberation and independence. The freedom fighters, the pioneers or the first generation of fighters who accompanied Awate, to launch the armed struggle were 13 heroes and they are:



1. Abdu Muhammad Faid
2. Ibrahim Mohammed Ali Qalhai
3. Humed Gadef
4. Awate Muhammad Faid

5. Baiareq Norai Adem
6. Muhammad Adem Hassan
7. Saleh Muhammad Adem Kiroug
8. Ahmed Fekak
9. Muhammad Al-Hassan Idris Dohen.
10. Adem Fegoorai
11. Ali Bekhit
12. Idris Mahmoud
13. Omer Muhammad Ali Karai

The news of Awate going out to the mountains (his rebellion) was a big surprise to the Ethiopian occupation authorities, who had never imagined for such a challenge to occur. Therefore, they immediately strived to contain the event by luring Awate by temptation with money and prestige by sending him a letter in this regard by one of the members of Eritrean Parliament. Awate replied by writing a letter in Italian language where he said:

"My rebellion by going to the mountains and raise up arms against Ethiopia is only for the Liberation of Eritrea and not for personal gains or benefits."

The Ethiopian occupation forces didn't stop their pressure to force Awate surrender and retreat from his call and waging of armed struggle. They went to great lengths and imprisoned several of his family members including his pregnant wife who gave birth in Tessenei prison to Karrar Hamid Awate, the son of our hero and martyr.

The Eritrean Minister of Justice (during the Federation period), Omer Hassen Hasano sent a written message to Hamid Awate, who was present at the time in "Algaden" region, asking Hamid Awate to meet him. Hamid replied with a written letter where he clearly rejected the meeting and confirmed his declaration of armed revolution in the following words (and that was on 10 / 9 / 1961):

"If you want to take down the Eritrean flag, I with all those with me, God willing, will raise it up with the force of arms and inform the Eritrean government about that."

Awate has been honest with the public and was always saying:

"The path of revolution is difficult, long and bumpy and it is flanked by risks and dangers from all sides. But it is the path with guaranteed results to approach the hour of salvation (from Ethiopian occupation)."

The first battle at *mount Adal* against the Ethiopian colonial presence in Eritrea! It was a message to the world that the people of Eritrea were impatient and decided to restore their usurped legitimate rights by armed forces (struggle). In this battle Awate and his colleagues were able to defeat the Ethiopian army and achieve a deserved military victory. In this first confrontation against the enemy forces which lasted for about six hours, the outcome boosted the moral of the heroic fighters to continue the long and hard road to freedom and independence.

The first *captive* of the Eritrean armed struggle for Liberation and Independence! At the first battle of Adal on the morning of 1st of September 1961, the first hero and fighter was captured by the enemy forces. He was the hero and fighter **Bairaq Adem** who was martyred in one of Ethiopian prisons in 1975.

The first *martyr* of the Eritrean armed struggle for Liberation and Independence! The second battle was at mount Omaal in 14/9/1961 in which Eritrea lost its first martyr and hero **Abdu Muhammad Faid**. In the third battle of **Adal Hajr** the leader Awate was wounded in his arm with a light wound.

The first *female martyr* of the Eritrean armed struggle for Liberation and Independence! No one can deny the role of Eritrean women in the armed struggle for Independence because they paid more than their expected shares. Their heroism, devotion, commitment is unparalleled in the world, and in an interview by fighter **Nisrit**

Karrar conducted by journalist Saleh Jazaeri under the title: "Forgotten pages of Eritrean Women history", she talked about the national roles by women in the early stage of armed struggle. She confirmed countless women were preparing food for the rebels in the countryside and helped them to take in and out of the cities all their needs. She mentioned the name of the first female martyr in Eritrean history of armed struggle, she was a young woman called **Fatma Jafar** from the city of Haikota who was killed while carrying out the tasks of the revolution.

Following the victories achieved by the Eritrean Liberation Army in the battle of Adal and Omaal, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie issued his strict orders to his armed forces in Eritrea to continue committing violence freely (which in practice means to commit crimes freely against the Eritrean people at large) in order to suppress the outlaws (the label given by the Emperor to the revolutionaries). To achieve their declared goals, the Ethiopian army mobilized more than one thousand and five hundred soldiers and began to plan to hit the whole region (where the fighters moved and were present) from all directions and then gradually narrow the hold and surround the rebels in a closed area to be able to exterminate them. Awate realized the seriousness of this aggressive plan aimed to quell the flames of revolution is in its infancy and to address the issues and the gravity of the situation, he called for a meeting with his fellow fighters, and addressed them by saying:

"You know that our number is small and we do not possess enough weapons fit for use to face the huge enemy forces creeping and targeting to extinguish the flame of revolution and kill the hope of liberation. We must work hard to keep the flame of revolution burning constantly until the full liberation of Eritrea is accomplished. If the flame is extinguished (God forbid) it will be very difficult to re-ignite it in a short time."

The battles led by Awate! The leader and martyr Awate led all the battles since the 1st of September 1961 (mount Adal, mount Omaal, Adal Hajar etc...) to the day of his death on 28th of May 1962.

In a meeting with the heroic and brave Eritrean Liberation Army (ELA) fighters, Awate addressed them by saying:

"My salute to the brave fighters who summoned all the national will and are competing riding the difficulties and sacrifices for the defense of your country, to give life and independence to your people. I am comfortable and fully confident that your enemy, their agents and spies after this day, cannot extinguish the spark of the Eritrean armed struggle."

Death of the hero: "The life of this hero was a series of sacrifices, which ended in his sudden martyrdom on a Monday morning of the 28th of May 1962. On the eve of a day full of activities, Awate moved with some of his fellow combatants to the village close to the mountains of Aktain (western Eritrea) in the Gash region and had dinner. As it was customary, after the dinner meal, Awate moved away from the village and camped in a safe place to spend the night. At midnight Awate awakened the fighter Kboub Hajjaj to tell him that he felt a sharp drop in his heart beats, and felt cold and pain throughout his body. Awate held his rifle (Abu Aashara), with which he fired the first shots of the Eritrean revolution armed struggle declaring its official birth, and handed it over to the pioneer Kboub Hajjaj and said to him:

Raise this rifle high (continue the armed struggle), until final victory is accomplished, God willing.

Then took his sword and gave it to Kboub Hajjaj and asked him to deliver it to his son Karar Hamid Awate. Also asked him to deliver the dagger to his nephew Awate Mohamed Fayed, and his briefcase of documents to his deputy Mohamed Idris Hajj, and then closed his eyes and calmly appeared resigned to a long drowsiness and rested in

peace. Awate was martyred at five in the morning (5 am) of that day with his face raised to the sky and his body embracing the dust of his dear and beloved homeland. His worldly body was gone forever, to live with us with his spirit and his eternal compassion and tenacity which is reflected in the heartbeats of his people (Eritrean people), leaving behind a generation of fighters to continue the march, amid storms raising the Eritrean flag high by changing hands martyr after martyr until the final victory will be accomplished.”

Burial place: Martyr Awate’s original burial place was kept secret (except to very few individuals) and it was in the east of Hadamdami and west of Gash where special and clear signals were marked to identify the burial place of the martyr Awate. In September 1994, the remains of martyr Hamid Awate were buried in the historic city of Haikota.



The Eritrean Opposition (political, non-violent), Resistance (use of force) and Revolution went through Four main historical phases or stages:

Phase One: The Muslim League (Al-Rabita Al-Islamiya al-Eritrea)

Al-Rabita was founded on 03 December 1946 in the town of Keren and its first conference was held in Keren on 18 February to 21 February 1947. The party was

officially founded on March 21, 1947. Mr. Bakri Merghani was nominated as the first Honorary President of the party, while Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan was elected as the first Secretary General of the party and Sheikh Abdul Kadir Kebire was elected as president of the branch of the capital Asmara and its environs (Hamassien).

The first martyr during the period of self-determination is the father of martyrs and national leader Sheikh Abdul Kader Muhammad Saleh Kebire one of the leaders of the Eritrean independence bloc. He was assassinated by Ethiopian gangs of the Andnet party at the eve of his departure to the United Nations to defend the right of his country and people to freedom and independence on March 29, 1949. He was the first political leader who was assassinated in the modern history of Eritrea. Hundreds of Rabita members had been killed by the “shifta” of Andnet supported and financed by Ethiopia, they also burned fields and shops and stole cattle belonging to the “supporters of Eritrean Independence”.

Al-Rabita al-Islamiya (the Muslim League) is the first Eritrean national party which formally and officially declared and fought for complete Eritrean Independence and rejected the unconditional union with Ethiopia as declared by the Unionist party (Andnet). So, we can conclude that on **21 March 1947**, the first Eritrean non-violent, political opposition party to Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea was declared.

Phase Two: The Independence Bloc

The Muslim League (Al-Rabita al-Islamiya), the Liberal Progressive party plus other five smaller parties met in Asmara and declared a united front to be named “**Independence Bloc**” on 22 July 1949. Their main objective was to **get direct Independence from Ethiopia** and formation of democratic government, preservation of Eritrea’s colonial borders and continue the struggle against the partition of Eritrea. The honorary and respected Ras Tessema Asberom was named the first President of the Bloc for Independence, Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan Ali was elected the Secretary General, and Woldeab Woldemariam became the Deputy Secretary General and editor of the

newspaper for the umbrella organization. By end of August 1949, it became a great and strong force and it represented about 75% of the Eritrean population and this caused the Ethiopian regime and the Unionist party to look for ways to disintegrated it by all means including propaganda, bribery, assassinations, and terrorism.

Phase Three: ELM (Eritrean Liberation Movement)

The ELM was formed in the port city of Port Sudan in 1958. It was an opposition movement to the incorporation of Eritrea to Ethiopia. It was involved in clandestine political activities intended to educate and prepare the Eritrean people to defy Ethiopian occupation and cultivate the culture of non-violent resistance. The movement was known also by “haraka” (which means movement) and “mahber showate” (group of seven); this is because the members were organized in groups of seven. The movement faced several grave setbacks and obstacles which endangered its existence and continuation. Its leadership was “unknown” and was kept as “secret” to its members and was residing outside Eritrea. The opposition in a non-violent way was fruitless because Ethiopia was ruthlessly crushing its members day after day. The feudal regime of Haile Sellasie was ready to destroy and kill as many people as possible and never listen to the demands of the Eritrean people. After the declaration of the armed struggle by Awate, the ELM members joined the ELF en masse and eventually all its members joined the armed struggle to fight the occupation forces.

Phase Four: Declaration of Armed Struggle by Hamid Awate “The Father and Founder of the Eritrean Revolution and armed struggle” to liberate Eritrea from Ethiopian occupation on 1st of September 1961.

Awate was regarded as the “savior” due to his history as local and national hero and due to his integrity and courage; thus, he was contacted by many people as individuals and groups, to initiate and declare the armed struggle for independence. Day after day, the Eritrean people were becoming impatient and hopeless because even the illegal and unjust Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia was abolished, the Eritrean flag was lowered

down and the two Eritrean official languages (Arabic and Tigrinya) were replaced by Amharic and the Ethiopian army entered Eritrea as occupation forces and the situation became very clear that the invasion of Eritrea was a nightmare which had to be opposed by all means to liberate Eritrea. The armed struggle and the use of force was the only option left after all the previous means such as non-violent and political opposition were exhausted and proved to be fruitless and delusional.

A synopsis of modern Eritrean political history:

The Italian king (Umberto I, king of Italy) proclaimed on 1st of January 1890 Eritrea as an Italian colony. The Italian colonization of Eritrea lasted 51 years (from 1890 to 1941) when Italy was defeated in the Second World War by the allies and lost all its colonies in Africa (Eritrea, Libya and Somalia).

After the Italian defeat, its Eritrean colony was made a British protectorate under the British Military Administration (BMA) by the allies, until the Eritrean people will decide their future. The BMA lasted from 1941 to 1952 until Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia under UN resolution 390 (V) against the will of the majority of the Eritrean people. The British era was a period of relative freedom where several Eritrean parties emerged, tens of newspapers and magazines came into existence, the education system developed and the Eritrean people had to decide for their political future and it was a period with marked turmoil and political instability because the "future" of Eritrea was undecided and the interferences by external forces i.e. Ethiopia, USA and British were at their peak.

A United Nations (UN) commission was dispatched to Eritrea in February of 1950 in the absence of Allied agreement and in the face of Eritrean demands for self-determination. On 2 December 1950, the United Nations General Assembly voted for a federal solution as the best way to resolve the Eritrean question. The resolution 390 (V) recommended the following:

- 1.-Eritrea shall constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian state.

2.-The Eritrean government shall possess legislative, executive, and judicial powers in the field of domestic affairs. (*Wikipedia*).

On the 11th September, 1952 the Territory of Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown under the feudalist Emperor Haile Selassie.

Within 10 years, Haile Selassie fundamentally transformed the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia and forcibly annexed Eritrea on 15 November 1962. Ethiopia's unilateral decision to annex Eritrea abrogated the UN provisions, which stated that only the UN General Assembly could amend the federal relationship. Ethiopia justified the annexation of Eritrea by referring to the Eritrean General Assembly's majority vote for the union in 1962.



What are the reasons that led to the declaration of “Armed Struggle” by martyr and hero Hamid Idris Awate?

External factors: USA In the cold war environment of the 1950s, the Ethiopians had Western political support for the consolidation of their control over Eritrea, which given its location on the Red Sea was of strategic interest to the Americans.

During the Cold War period between the Western Bloc led by USA and Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the world witnessed deadly wars and competition between the two blocs to exert their control over the world. During the process of Cold War competition, many wars were fought and many countries were the stages of their wars the result being the world being divided between East and West or being one of their satellites revolving around them. Eritrea, and specifically Asmara was an ideal place due to its altitude and location to be used as a Radio operating site by the USA to spy on the Soviet Union communications.

“The Cold War listening station, Kagnew Station, was located nearly on the equator and at an altitude of 7,300 feet (2,200 m) above sea level. Its altitude and close proximity to the equator made Kagnew Station an ideal site for the Cold War listening station's dishes and the 2,500-acre (10 km²) antenna farm. In all Kagnew sprawled over 3,400 acres (14 km²) containing eight fenced or walled tracts. Kagnew Station became home for over 5,000 American citizens at a time during its peak years of operation during the 1960s.”

(Source: Kagnew Station - From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)



Kagnew Station – Asmara (main gate)

After the war (WWII), the United Nations conducted a lengthy inquiry regarding the status of Eritrea, with the superpowers each vying for a stake in the state's future. Britain, the last administrator at the time, put forth the suggestion to partition Eritrea between Sudan and Ethiopia, separating Christians and Muslims. The idea was instantly rejected by all Eritrean political parties as well as the UN. The United States point of view was expressed by its then chief foreign policy advisor John Foster Dulles who said:

“From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea Basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country [Eritrea] be linked with our ally, Ethiopia.” John Foster Dulles, 1952 (Source: Heiden, Linda (June 1978 1979). "The Eritrean Struggle for Independence". *Monthly Review* 30 (2): 15.)

The regional security interests of the western powers and the polarized political situation resulted in a compromise: autonomy for Eritrea within an Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation. The United States of America was influential in securing this solution because of its control in the United Nations in the immediate post-war period. Ethiopian guarantees of the use of a telecommunications complex (Kagnew Station) near Asmara seem to have been crucial.

Thus the rights of Eritrean people were ignored and usurped at the expense of USA interests (use of Kagnew Station) and Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea to have access to the sea and enslave the Eritrean people.

External factors: Israel: Under Haile Selassie rule, relations with Israel and that country's assistance complemented the above ties with United States, who, by the time of the Suez crisis in 1956, “finally provided Ethiopia with the type, if not the amount, of American assistance the emperor really wanted.”

Incoda [which exported Ethiopian beef] was a station for Israeli intelligence in Africa. We had a huge arms cache. It was there when we arrived...There was a military delegation [in Ethiopia], and they did their correspondence through us. With Israeli spies in Arab countries as well. We were only a cover in Mossad deals.

Israel had a dozen or more advisers on counterinsurgency based in Eritrea. They organized, trained and supplied Ethiopian commandos and frontiers guards-men, whose numbers numbered 3,200 and 1,200, respectively, by 1974. Also, the Israeli were involved when the Eritrean conflict spilled over the border into Sudan.

(Source: conflict Quarterly Israel and Ethiopia: from a Special to a Pragmatic Relationship by: Michael B. Bishku page 46)

Again the rights of Eritrean people were ignored and usurped at the expense of Israel interests (use Eritrea as a station for Israel intelligence in Africa) and Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea to have access to the sea and enslave the Eritrean people.

Ethiopian History: The Ethiopian Emperor born Tafari Makonnen, renamed himself **Haile Selassie** (which means “power of Trinity”) to endow “sanctity or holiness” to himself and to be able to rule as “God sent king” to subjugate the Ethiopian people and enslave them in the name of “God” and by the help and collaboration of the Christian Orthodox Church. He also called himself the “Lion of Judah” (*Conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah Haile Sellasie I Elect of God, Emperor of Ethiopia*) for he accepted and promoted the myth and the unfounded historical fairy tales and lies (as described in the book “Kebra Nagast”) which says that the Ethiopian Solomonic ruling dynasty established in 1270 A.D., of which he was the last, that had its roots with the birth of Menelik I, who was said to be the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon.

“The amusing and interesting character of the book which piles up fancy tales, fables, legends, folk-lore, dogma, mysticism and pious remarks on a substratum of historical fact was frankly admitted by all the reviewers, but a few of them raised the question of the

historicity of the Book of the Glory of Kings. It must be said at once that we shall never know whether the queen who visited SOLOMON was a pure-blooded ABYSSINIAN or an Arab queen from YAMAN or HADRAMAUT or some other part of the great Arabian Peninsula. But the tradition that some "Queen of the South" *did* visit SOLOMON is so old and so widespread, that a kernel of historical fact, however small, must be hidden somewhere in it.”

(Source: Preface to the present edition of the book “Kebra Nagast” by: Sir E. A. Wallis Budge MCMXXXII Oxford university Press London: Humphrey Milford)

Ethiopian history is one of oppression (domination by the Amhara or Tigray rulers) to the rest of Ethiopian people, based on fables and fairy tales. The same was used in Europe in the middle ages and in Russia before the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1917. The feudalist medieval Ethiopian king of kings was the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and had great influence to control and subjugate the Ethiopian and Eritrean people by using the “church” and “religion” to his own advantage and he was successful and ruled for about 44 years.

In Europe when such events occurred a century ago (use of religion to enslave people and accept the king as sent by God) as Karl Marx described “religion is the opium of the people”, when rebellions occurred which completely separated religion from politics resulting in secular system of governance. In Ethiopia (including Eritrea) the church succeeded to brain wash millions of people and made them submissive (to authority) people who believed in the notorious slogan “**zbereket tsahaina , zneghese ngusna**” (whichever sun rises is ours and whoever king rules we submit to him). The brain washed Eritreans became ardent supporters of Ethiopia and the unconditional union of Eritrea to mother Ethiopia and their dogma reached its zenith when they declared “Ethiopia wei mot” (Ethiopia or death) and committed shameful crimes against the noble and nationalist Eritrean people who were calling for Eritrean Independence to free them from Amhara subjugation and enslavement.

Ethiopia: Haile Selassie The unjust and unfair Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia was “**born dead**” because the Ethiopian Emperor understood it to be a transition forced stage before complete annexation to his feudalist empire. While the Eritrean people and nationalist parties considered it to be better than “unconditional union with mother Ethiopia” as demanded by UP. The king of kings Haile Selassie crossed the Mereb river on 4 October 1952 to celebrate and inaugurate the “federation” a curse fallen upon the Eritrean people.

In a long speech in Asmara he unashamedly claimed and said: “**Eritrea is part of Ethiopia...Asmara was founded by Ras Alula and Adoulis was an Ethiopian port**”, instead of talking about the federal system and its implementation.



Haile Selassie in 1952 while crossing the Mereb river to enter Eritrea from Ethiopia

The honorable first Eritrean Mufti Sheikh Al Mukhtar Ibrahim Ahmed Omar wrote under the title: “Abolition of the Federal system and its serious implications” under “Hawadith” or “Incidents” section describing the incident as follows:

“The priest Dimitros Ghebremariam (Vice President of the Eritrean Assembly), together with Asfaha Woldemicael (Chief Executive of Eritrea after Tedla Bairu) and Tedla Oqbit (Eritrea’s Police Commissioner) were the primary players who orchestrated the abolition of “federation” in the Eritrean Assembly in collaboration with Ethiopia. Ethiopian

foreign minister Aklilu Habtewold was present in Asmara during that period and conducted meeting in the imperial palace with many people. Dimitros called many MPs to his office and asked them to sign documents to support and request the abolition the federal system and demand unconditional union with Ethiopia. The priest offered many MPs generous donations and promised more and valuable donations from the Emperor to follow. However, he threatened those who refused or were hesitant by severe punishments and said to those MPs that the country is threatened by “Shiftas” and there is no solution except union with Ethiopia to save the country. He was provoking fear of Islamic expansion from neighboring countries and confirmed to the Christian MPs, the only safe solution was to unite with Ethiopia to avoid the calamity.

On Wednesday, the **14th of November 1962** at 10:30 am Asfaha Woldemicael arrived with his ministers and with Tedla Oqbit to the Eritrean Parliament and delivered a very long speech. He surprised the MP a proposal to declare by their name to abolish the Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia and annex Eritrea to Ethiopia in a unitary system (to be Eritrea the 14th province of Ethiopia). Immediately after him Dimetros supported and blessed the abolition of Federation.”

Thus in a very poorly directed play in an illegal and sarcastic way, even the unjust and forced federal system was abolished leading the country to an era of endless sufferings and bloodshed.

Within 10 years, Haile Selassie fundamentally transformed the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia and **forcibly annexed Eritrea on 15 November 1962**. Ethiopia’s unilateral decision to annex Eritrea abrogated the UN provisions, which stated that only the UN General Assembly could amend the federal relationship. Ethiopia justified the annexation of Eritrea by referring to the Eritrean General Assembly’s majority vote for the union in 1962. Eritrean nationalists, however, discounted the General Assembly’s vote by alleging that the Ethiopian regime had packed the chamber with its supporters and destroyed the integrity of the National Assembly.

In 1956 the Ethiopian government began to destroy the democratic features of the Eritrean state. The Ethiopians banned independent political parties and muzzled the press. It forced opponents of annexation to go into exile while the office of the chief executive was put under the control of the government's representative, the *enderassee*. In 1958 the disembodied Eritrean National Assembly voted to rescind their right to fly an Eritrean flag and later, in 1959 when Ethiopian law was imposed on Eritrea, it virtually destroyed the Eritrean National Assembly's legitimacy and power to act independently. The final act of Eritrean annexation was the National Assembly's announcement of the legalization of the annexation.

“**Kennedy Trevaskis**, a British official, has depicted the role of the priesthood under the direction of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the role of Ethiopia in giving direction and assistance to the Unionist movement and the part played by the church hierarchy in influencing the Christian community.

“By 1942 every priest had become a propagandist in the Ethiopian cause, every village had become a centre of Ethiopian nationalism and popular religious festivals such as Maskal (the Feast of the Cross) had become occasions for open displays of Ethiopian patriotism. The cathedrals, the monasteries and village churches would be festooned with Ethiopian flags and the sermons and prayers would be delivered in unequivocal language.”

Divide and Rule: Every colonialist power had used skillfully the “divide and rule” method to enslave and kneel down their subjects and conquer them. The British Empire was exemplary in the use and success of this method.

In Eritrea, the Ethiopian Emperor discovered the “religion” tool to be his best option and used it extensively. The majority of Eritrean highland Christians belongs to the Orthodox Church the same Church of the majority of Ethiopian Christians of which the emperor was the Leader (highest authority). The Emperor with the help of the Church and priests

was able to convince and win the majority of Eritrean Orthodox Christians. He used the religion card very well with the help of Eritrean priests such as Abune Markos and Keshi Dimitros.

“Religious propaganda went along with religious pressure. In 1949, before the arrival of the UN Commission, the church announced in the newspaper Ethiopia that those who supported independence would not be baptized, married or buried and would be given neither communion nor absolution. The effect of what was a declaration of excommunication on a traditionally religious society was considerable.

The Unionist party was also linked to Ethiopia through the Ethiopian liaison officer in Asmara, Colonel Nega Selassie. It used less spiritual influence to further its goals: assassinations, bombs and grenades were used against supporters of independence.“
(Source: ERITREAN NATIONALISM David Pool page 182)

The majority of the active members of the Unionist Party (unconditional union with Ethiopia) were influenced by religion and their party was financed by Ethiopia while the Christian Orthodox church provided the support and advocacy in all its weekly sermons. The UP was also able to win the support of some of the **Muslim “tribal aristocracy”** or chief men from the western lowlands and coastal regions of Eritrea because they hoped and believed that the future Ethiopian government will allow them to keep their feudal privileges. These tribal chiefs were losing their inherited social prestige and privilege due to social and historical developments; thus, they believed by cooperating and supporting union with Ethiopia to preserve their social status and privileges. The most famous amongst them was Kantebai Osman of Sahel whose ardent support of union with Ethiopia was strong. The UP was the most violent party and some of its members committed several terrorist activities against many nationalist and proud Eritreans.”

But we have to remember those brave highland Christians who adamantly opposed Ethiopian propaganda, pressure and terrorism and paid dearly for their defiance. At the

forefront comes the honorary and nationalist Raas Tesema Asberom, Woldeab Woldemariam and many others. Also, the role of the Liberal Progressive Party was great and ultimately the formation of the **Independence Bloc** by Eritreans (Muslims and Christians) showed that the Ethiopian card of “religion” did not succeed. When the Eritrean people were united as “Eritreans” they succeeded and the Independence Bloc represent a brilliant side of our modern history. Again the ELM was a great experience which united the Eritrean people as “Eritreans” fighting to get their independence from Ethiopian occupation.

However, the 30 years of armed struggle based a strong foundation for the “unity” of the Eritrean people, because all Eritreans regardless of their religion, region, ethnicity, social status, fought side by side in an exemplary way of comradeship and companionship to liberate their land from occupation.

We have to invest on the positive side of our history to build a democratic state where the majority rules and all the minorities rights are respected (the unity of the Eritrean people and land... should not be and must not be at the expense of some in favor of others, a constitutional social justice, rule of law and democratic institutions should prevail to safeguard and protect the rights of all and each Eritrean regardless of his ethnicity, social group, religion or region). We have to build institutions to be the fundamentals to be governed by rule of law, justice and democracy.

Our heroic martyrs paved the way for our liberty, unity and prosperity and we have to build our nation armed with optimism and determination. We have to protect our unity and sovereignty because the price paid to get our Independence was very high and very dear. We have to learn from our past mistakes and learn from history, look forward and thrive for better future for our new generations to come.

United we stand and succeed...Divided we fail and fall

Golden Jubilee

People who don't respect and honor their heroes and national symbols...do not deserve a life of dignity and freedom!!!!!! Thus, it is our national and moral responsibility to respect, honor, write their true history, celebrate and commemorate their anniversaries.

Change comes only when we have a free and dedicated people who understand well their reality and feel the sufferings and the crimes inflicted upon their people and are ready and willing to struggle and sacrifice themselves for the sake of their people, for their liberty and emancipation and for the sake of a better and brighter future.

Today after 20 years of Eritrean land liberation and 50 years since the launching of the armed struggle for Eritrean Independence and freedom and after 64 years since the beginning of Eritrean resistance and opposition for Eritrean Independence and freedom...what did we achieve???

The Eritrean land is liberated but the Eritrean people are not free !!!

We have in Eritrea a regime led by a tyrant who is leading Eritrea to destruction and complete failure. We have to fight relentlessly to gain our "freedom" from the illegal and criminal despot, because the **"Eritrean people are not Free"**. On the occasion of this "Golden Jubilee" I would like to present my gratitude, recognition and respect to all Eritrean martyrs and fighters of the last 64 years. It is because of their sacrifices that today we have a country called Eritrea; therefore, we will never forget them and we will follow their entrust to "liberate" the Eritrean people from dictatorship.

The "hope" lies on the Eritrean "Youth" those inside and outside Eritrea. On this occasion of the "golden jubilee" to bear their historical responsibility to liberate the Eritrean people from tyranny. As we can see the "revolutionary spring" in the region they are led by "young" people who revolted against oppression and dictatorship and we are hopeful to be part of this blessed change. The events have shown that the dictators are fallible, weak and can be defeated and as we can see they are following down like dry autumn

leaves. Please do not wait and expect a lot from others, plan and act and fight for change at the right time with the right means as determined by you.

I am fully confident that change is imminent and what we have to care most on HOW Eritrea to be ruled and not interested WHO rules Eritrea. It is ideal and a must that we all have to work together, complement each other, support each other and respect the choices of each other and try to resolve and narrow our differences as much as possible for the sake of our poor people, refugees and country.

Undoubtedly, our heroic martyrs will be remembered forever. Our war veterans, handicaps, orphans, widows, refugees, war victims. These are our pride, our best, our people and our dignity. All of them fought and paid dearly for the sake of our freedom and independence.

The price of Eritrean independence was very high and we must acknowledge its value. Let us continue on the same spirit of Awate and all our martyrs to build a strong nation based on rule of law, justice and equality to restore and materialize the entrust of our brave martyrs.

Glory and eternity to ALL our faithful heroes and martyrs

Glory and honor to the “Father of the Eritrean Revolution and armed struggle martyr and hero Hamid Idris Awate for Freedom and Independence”

Long Live Liberated Eritrea and its Free people!

Prepared on the occasion of:

GOLDEN JUBILEE (September 01, 1961 – September 01, 2011)

Prepared by: Aamer Saleh Hagos