

Fisheha Desta's Reminiscence of the Ethiopian Revolution: A Critical Review

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*Considering Meison's visionary ideologue, EPRP's firm convictions, and the Derg's commitment to unity and sovereignty, if these were to operate in a conducive socio-political and economic environment, they would have ushered in Ethiopia's successful development!
(Fisheha Desta, as paraphrased by professor Desta.)*

Last year, while we were reviewing KhasayAbraha Bistrats' book , entitled "A Special Love for Assimba" at the National Archives and Library in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, one of the reviewers, Professor GebruTareke, brought to the attention of the audience that in addition to the books written by former President Mengistu Haile Mariam (hereafter Mengistu) and former Prime Minister Fikre Selassie Wegderase (hereafter Fikre Selassie), the former Vice President, Fisheha Desta (hereafter Fisheha, or the author) has written an account of his memories of the Ethiopian Revolution during the Derg's (an Amharic word for committee) era. During a private conversation, Professor GebruTareke told me that Fisheha's book would be favorably received by the public and probably would be marketed heavily when compared with the fictitious account of the Derg's era written by Mengistu and Fikre Selassie. In addition, as Professor Gebru told me, which is now acknowledged by the author on page 4, Professor Gebru had advised the author to be truthful and profoundly search his memory to reconstruct the so-called " bloodless revolution" that was usurped or snatched by the Derg from the genuine Ethiopian revolutionaries.

Similarly, when there was an informal talk about the possibility of the author writing a book, one of the distinguished advisors of the Derg, without hesitation, reflected loudly and clearly that if an authentic, and true account of the Derg's administrative style and military history were to be written, the distinguished advisor of the Derg argued that this should be Fisheha's book.

In short, the prominent but anonymous member of the Derg asserted that Fisheha's account is likely to be more reliable than what was recorded by Mengistu and Fikre Selassie because Fisheha was not only a prolific writer but also Fisheha was in charge of the Derg's administrative apparatus and Fisheha had unstrained access to all the documents that pertained to the Derg's era.

After many months of delay, now Fisheha's (hereafter the author's) book has been released and is in the open market for the general public. Though it might sound like a marketing gimmick, the publisher claims that the author's book is more original and stands out as more authentic than those previously published by contemporaries of the author. Though

many prospective readers have received the author's book with some skepticism, the publisher wholeheartedly endorses the author's book as truthful because the author genuinely extends a deep and heartfelt apology to 1) the parents who not only lost their children but were also forced to pay for the bullets used to kill their innocent sons and daughters, and 2) other Ethiopians who were humiliated, offended, victimized, terrorized, assaulted, and injured for their ideological differences during the Derg's military rule in Ethiopia. Also, the author's book is regarded by the publisher as unique because it reveals for the first time, the hideous death of the well-known Ethiopian creative writer, Ba'lu Girma, about whom a large number of Ethiopians were left clueless concerning his disappearance.

Contrary to the command and control policy that prevailed during the communist period of the Derg's era, in which the author served as a faithful and very important functionary, the author claims that he had a special love for his country. It is exciting to read the author's book because the author feels that he can't undo the numerous inhuman atrocities committed by the Derg but can apologize for them. As a reborn advocate of democracy and the rule of law, the author openly advocates for human rights and citizen participation, sovereignty, control of the abuse of power, and political tolerance. He is very much interested to get constructive feedback from the readers of his book.

Despite having lost a number of my friends and family members, including my younger brother, and that I was pulled from my job at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, by the Derg, the advice of the Nobel Laureate, Desmond Tutu, that there can be "No Future Without Forgiveness," I forgive the author and congratulate him for having the stamina and the courage to reveal to the public part of the story that occurred during the Derg's era. I am also sure that the author's motives to write the book didn't emerge for further aggrandizement or to rekindle his personal ambitions, but it is my belief that the book is based on a sincere desire to bring closure to his personal role during the military regime that extended from February, 1974 to April, 1991.

Keeping the above statements in mind, I had no trouble constructively reviewing Fisshea's book considering the questions given below:

- 1) Does the book have a clear purpose?
- 2) Is the book rigorous and objective?
- 3) Is the book parsimonious and glaring enough to explain the pros and cons of the Derg's period?
- 5) What lessons can we learn from the author's book?

To answer the above questions as objectively as possible, within the fifteen chapters of the book five major sections of the book are briefly explored.

In Section One of the book, the author documents historically in 3 chapters the pre-1974 upheavals that occurred in Ethiopia and outlines the emergence of the Derg to power. At the outset, the author humbly states that he has a very limited background for carrying out historical analysis. With this modest beginning, in Chapter 1 the author uses primary and secondary sources of information to document the history of Ethiopia starting from the era of Emperor Tewdros, Yohannes IV, and Menelik II. Furthermore, the author illustrates some of the conspicuous pre-1974 political upheavals that were supported by the Wayne group, the Oromo group, the Eritrean Liberation Movements, and the uprising that occurred in Gojjam and Balie.

Despite the attempt of Emperor Haile Selassie to partially modernize, and institutionalize his semi-feudal authoritarian regime, the author argues that the socialist-oriented Ethiopian university and high school students were not prepared to accept the autocratic nature of Haile Selassie's government. More particularly, the university students didn't accept sitting quietly when a large part of the rural land was owned and controlled by absentee landlords. In 1965, for example, university students demanded land reform and spread their passionate slogan "land to the tiller" to capture the hearts of the Ethiopian masses. More seriously, the author states that as students became more radicalized, vocal students like Waleigne Makonen, demanded that as Ethiopia was a mosaic of nationalities, national groups should be allowed to entertain their rights to self-determination up to and including secession.

As Ethiopia's economic condition deteriorated, the author argues that the militant university and high school student demonstrations were accompanied by a mass movement that embraced the peasantry, urban proletariat, and the rank and file of the army. As a result, the country was sent into turmoil.

In Chapter 2, the author documents how the uprising that was started by the armed forces of Nageli in February 1974 for financial gain culminated with the emergence of the 109 Derg members who maintained their center of operations at the Army Headquarters at Mashiloka, Addis Ababa. Later, the disgruntled group composed of the Armed Forces, the Police, Air Force, Navy, Imperial Body Guard, and the Territorial Army formed the Provincial Military Administration Council (PMAC).

Using "Ethiopia First" as a slogan and emphasizing the various forms injustice, corrupt behavior, and the divide and rule policy that characterized the Haile Selassie regime, the Derg started arousing the country against the Haile Selassie regime. Eventually, the PMAC

embarked on structurally dismantling the existing institutions and finally overthrew the decaying system of Haile Selassie's regime in August, 1974. As the PMAC was in power, with little knowledge of socialism, the Derg not only acquired great political clout but also borrowed from socialist states like the Soviet Union, China, and Tanzania to embark on the nationalization of the commanding heights of the Ethiopian economy.

In Chapter 3, the author brings to the attention of his readers that as the Derg gradually rose to power, serious types of irreconcilable differences developed between the then Chairman General Aman Andom (hereafter Aman) and Vice Chairman, Mengistu. As stated by the author, Chairman Aman made it crystal clear to Mengistu that instead of working with 109 mumbo-jumbo types of Derg members, he would like to manage the country with about 14 highly trained and manageable committee members. Also, Chairman Aman emphasized his strong belief that the Eritrean issue could be peacefully resolved through an open dialogue with the Eritrean fighters. Following his convictions, Chairman Aman started giving clear instructions to the 2nd Division of the Ethiopian Army Unit headquartered in Asmara to refrain from using unnecessary force against the Eritrean guerrilla fighters.

As stated by the author, Vice Chairman Mengistu had a hidden agenda to be the head of state. Therefore, not only did Mengistu start defaming the most respected Chairman as an Eritrean but also rallied against his strategies. Mengistu chose to operate in the interest of national security and sovereignty and he decided to wipeout completely the Eritrean guerrilla fighters by military force.

The rivalry between Aman and Mengistu was prolonged because they could not come to terms on how the imprisoned former Haile Selassie officials would be treated. Aman's position was that the imprisoned Haile Selassie officials be treated with the due process of law. Realizing that Chairman Aman was moving in a different direction, and in collaboration with his cliques, Mengistu started intercepting the various appeals and discussions that Chairman Aman had with his friends and supporters on issues related to the re-structuring of Ethiopia's political scene to put an end to leading the country by semi-literate and irresponsible military gangs. Ignoring the due process of law and following the advice of Dr. Berket Habte Selassie (by the way, Professor Berket never anticipated that Mengistu would ever attempt to kill General Aman) and also as is widely known throughout Ethiopia, that Mengistu was getting indirect signals from Professor MesfinWolde Mariam, for example, "It is not us but you who have the weapons," the brutal, blood thirsty, power monger, Mengistu and his cliques, without consulting the other Derg members, summarily executed Chairman Aman and 60 former senior dignitaries of the Haile Selassie regime in November 23, 1974. As a result, the radical action by Mengistu and his cliques not only ended the so called "bloodless Revolution in Ethiopia" but also ended

the peaceful way of solving the Eritrean problem as outlined by General Aman, the most charismatic visionary, and strategic leader that the Derg had ever seen.

In chapter 3, the author documents the underlying reasons the Derg and its cliques designed the “Development through Cooperation (*Zemecha*) Campaign,” a program that dispatched about 60,000 university and junior and senior high school students and their teachers to the countryside. In short, the author claims that the program participants were sent to the rural part of Ethiopia in order to mobilize rural masses, explain how the land reform program could be implemented, to spread literacy to the rural masses, and to raise the political consciousness of the rural mass (p.136).

On the other hand, to calm the mass upheaval of the militant groups, the author mentions that the Derg established an Advisory Board. Being part of the drafting Advisory Board, the author tells his readers that a document was drafted as a directive for the PMAC to establish a democratic civilian government that called for the establishment of unity to bring about equity among the various multi-cultural and religious groups in Ethiopia.

In Chapter 4, as an introduction to the land reform policy initiated by the Derg, the author discusses briefly the landholding system during feudal times and goes on to describe how remnants of the former landowners attempted to destabilize the system after they evacuated and started settling in various urban areas and the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. Though it is subject to further investigation and without giving credible evidence to support his claim, the author states that the most well-known militants during the Ethiopian Student Movement, Meles Tekle, senior, Giday Gebrewhed, and Rezan Kidan, collaborated with the Eritrean Liberation Fighters and attempted bombing and burning the Wabi Sheble Hotel, the Addis Ababa Municipality Office, and the Bole Shell Oil Distribution Center.

The author indicates that the land reform policy, Women’s Organization, Debating Societies, Ethiopian Labor movement, and Teacher’s Union, initiated by the PMAC, were supported by the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON). But, as the author stated it, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) which was founded in 1972 in West Berlin, Germany, only supported the land reform policy. The EPRP stood against the vague patriotic slogan of “Ethiopia First” designed by the military and showed its irreconcilable ideological conflicts with MEIOSON. Claiming itself to be a vanguard party, the EPRP used various types of clashes and conflicts in Addis Ababa and finally, called loudly for the abolishment of the Derg and its program for the establishing of a “Democratic Government in Ethiopia”.

In Chapter 5 of **Section 2**, the author narrates the establishment of the National Democratic Revolutionary Program. To calm the controversies that erupted within the PMAC, a few of the Derg members were sent for ten months to the Soviet Union to study and observe in practice the application of scientific socialism (Marxism). Though they were not meant to last long, about five in-formal political parties (MEIOSON, EPRP, SADED (Revolutionary Flame), Waz League (Labor), and the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Communist Party were formed.

In Chapter 6, the author eloquently narrates the skirmishes and intrigues that occurred within Menelik's Royal Palace against Vice Chairman Mengistu for allegations that Mengistu was being too despotic, had betrayed the Revolution and also for consolidating his power against the formation of the People's Democracy in Ethiopia.

In the first part of Chapter 7, the author narrates vividly the nine assassination attempts against Vice Chairman Mengistu. The organizers of the plots against Mengistu were fully convinced that Mengistu in collaboration with Meison (p.214) had become the authority figure and the major originator of the Derg's so called decisions.

The second part of chapter 7 gives a narrative of the atrocities committed by the EPRP. It also blames the radical cliques of the EPRP for throwing its vigorous and staunch supporters into the jaws of the Red Terror of the PMAC machinery. However, it needs to be made crystal clear that, since Colonel Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, then head of National Security, was known for giving conflicting reports to his authorities, the authenticity of the blame that the author attributes to the EPRP is based on a 95-page report given by Berhane Meskel's Reda, the former chairman of the EPRP. It needs to be seriously questioned.

The third part of the chapter vividly enumerates how two of the Derg's officers (Captain Moges and Captain Alemayohu) played major roles in the restructuring of the Derg's organization, and also in restricting Mengistu from making decisions by himself, without consulting the Derg.

To the surprise of Mengistu, Meison, Waz League, etc, the then Chairman, General Teferi Benti, openly invited the politically alienated EPRP members to participate with the other groups in substantive political dialogues. Conspiring with other security officers (such as Colonel Daniel Asfaw, then Head of the National Security and others), Mengistu and his cliques designed an effective strategy to wipeout General Teferi Benti and his associates (such as Captain Moges, Captain Alemayhou etc).

Mengistu achieved his goal, he was unanimously elected to be the Chairman of the PMAC. Eventually, the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization was established through the merger of Meison, Seded, Echaat (the Ethiopian Oppressed Mass Unity Struggle), Mal Red or Emalered (Ethiopian Marxist Leninist Revolutionary Organization)

and the Waz League (p.234). In retrospect, taking a neutral stand, the author reflects that had it not been for the mal- political climate that prevailed over the Derg era; the unnecessary atrocities that were committed on each other during the Red and White Terror period; then collectively pursuing the visionary stance of Meison combined with the firm convections of the EPRP and the nationalistic stance of the Derg would have ushered to maximize Ethiopia's development.

In Chapter 8 of **Section 3**, the author addresses the Somali annexation of Ethiopia and the reasons the United States betrayed its longtime ally, Ethiopia, and instead started supporting the Republic of Somalia. In addition, the author narrates some of the most important factors that gave birth to the formation of the Ethiopian Workers Party (EWP). Concerning the Ethio-Somali war, the author states that Somalia annexed Ogaden, the Somali inhabited region of Ethiopia, in order to realize its dream of forming a unified "Greater Somalia." (Somalia had a dream of incorporating the Somali inhabitants in the Horn of Africa, i.e., Northern Kenya, Djibouti, Ogaden, North and South Somaliland.) During the war that lasted from July, 1977 to May, 1978, the United States supported Somalia and withdrew assistance to Ethiopia when the Derg declared itself to be Socialist. In addition, the United States felt that in Ethiopia there was a flagrant violation of human rights because the Chairman of the PMCA was assassinated by Mengistu and his cliques in January, 1977 (p.272). Nonetheless, because it was the Cold War Period and Ethiopia was regarded a genuine Marxist-Leninist nation, it was able to get support from the Soviet Union. Using his good office, the author tells his readers that he was able to solicit and get assistance from other socialist countries such as, East Germany, Poland, Cuba, Hungary, North Korea, etc.

As the Derg was strategizing how to defend Somalia's aggression, the author reveals that to the surprise of many of the Derg members, Colonel Atnafu Abate, the Vice Chairman of the PMAC, raised his hand and openly told the PAMC that instead of pursuing a command type of economy, it would be better for Ethiopia to pursue a mixed type of economy. After enduring a long diatribe by the cliques of Mengistu, Colonel Abate was handcuffed and dragged aside by Mengistu's, henchman, Major Getachew Shebashi. Not surprisingly, later it was announced to the Ethiopian public that Colonel Abate was executed because of his anti-revolutionary stand.

While this was fermenting, Somalia had no choice but to break its diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and instead depended on United States' assistance in exchange for the use of Somali bases. In addition, the author asserts that the huge turmoil in Eritrea and other parts of Ethiopia and the allegation that the EPRP sabotaged Ethiopia's effort to crush the Somali incursion, gave a major advantage to Somalia. Also, since Somalia was a member of the Arab League, Somalia was able to get assistance from a number of Arab states.

However, it was indicated by the author that after almost a year of heavy fighting the Ethiopia-Cuba army was able to drive the Somali National Army off Ethiopia's soil in March, 1978.

Chapter 9, titled "Our win in the East will continue in the North," concerns the win that Ethiopia scored against the Somali incursion that was believed would continue with a win in Northern Ethiopia (in Eritrea). The chapter also talks about the Celebration of Ethiopia's 4th Revolution that was attended by the president of Cuba, Fidel Castro.

Gaining partial relief from internal upheavals and external aggression, the Derg finally was able to begin designing plans for development. In October 1978, the Derg, on paper, announced the formation of the National Revolutionary Development Campaign to mobilize and harness the country's national resources and transform Ethiopia's economy. To construct the necessary base, the Derg initiated a mass literacy campaign in five languages: Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, Wolayta, and Somali and later the number of instructional languages were to be expanded to fifteen languages. With the nationalization of the Ethiopian Airlines, the continuous forms of strife that prevailed in the country, and the fact that that the Soviet Union was interested in supplying airplanes and indirectly running the Ethiopian Airlines, the Ethiopian airlines faced financial ruin due to poor administration. However, based on the ingenuity of the author and the advice of the former managers of the Ethiopian Airline, the administrative structure of the Ethiopian Airlines was reorganized and the Ethiopian government extended financial capital to lift it out of crisis. Eventually the Ethiopian Airlines regained its status as an aviation power.

In **Section 4**, the author states that starting in 1976, the Derg embarked a Program for the National Democratic Revolution (PNDR). The primary objective of the PNDR was to become socialist under the leadership of workers, peasants, and other anti-feudal forces. In order to form a civilian vanguard party, in 1979, with the dismemberment of the Derg, and electing Mengistu as its chairman, the Derg formed the Commission to Organize the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE). In September, 1984, the Worker's Party of Ethiopia was proclaimed. With little or no understanding of Ethiopia's culture or how to align it with the Soviet Union's modus operandi, in 1987, Ethiopia drafted a new constitution in line with the Soviet constitution of 1977.

As discussed in Chapter 10, the Derg established the People's Democratic Republic Ethiopia (PDRE) with little attention to the consequent economic collapse, drought, famine, and military setbacks in the Northern part of Ethiopia. Also, the Derg focused on establishing the Institute for the Study of Nationalization (ISN) in 1983, and forced settlement or villagization schemes without providing adequate services to implement it.

In Chapter 11, subject to discourse, the author claims that it was the Tigray Liberation Front (TLF), and not the Tigray's People Liberation Front that originated the Tigray movement. However, what is certain about the author's illustration is that he gives a firsthand narration of the various forms of injustice that the people of Tigray faced while they were under the Haile Selassie regime. In addition, though the author, being in power during the Derg's era had undeniable allegiance to the Derg and his country, he narrates the various forms of harassment and mistrust that he faced for being suspected as a "double dealer Tigraian" and informant for the TPLF because he was raised and grew up in Tigray.

Concerning the "Eritrean Dilemma" (Chapter 12), the author outlines three different perspectives. The first perspective argues that Eritrea needed the federal status that it had (the United Nations General Assembly federated Eritrea with Ethiopia) before it was forcefully dissolved by Ethiopia in 1962. Others claim that like other nationalities in Ethiopia, the Eritrean issue could have been peacefully solved if the Eritrean people were accorded the right to exercise self-determination up to and including secession. Others groups such as the Tigraian People's Liberation Front, assert that as a former colony of Italy, Eritrea needed to be bestowed nothing but its full independence because it faced indirect colonialization by the Ethiopian empire.

As stated by the author, after the Derg came to power, with the assistance of East Germany and the Soviet Union, it attempted to resolve the Ethio-Eritrean war. But overtime, the Eritrean armed struggle was carefully led by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Actually, during the Ethio-Somali War the Eritrean forces almost drove away the Ethiopian Forces from Eritrea. But, after the Ethiopian and Cuban forces repulsed the Somali incursion, the Ethiopian army swiftly handled the Eritrean guerrilla forces causing them retreat to their enclaves. Afterwards, the Ethiopian army launched a number offensives including the famous "the Red Star Offense in 1982" to dismantle the Eritrean guerrilla fighters, but the Derg forces could not crush the Eritrean forces because the Eritreans fighters were supported by the Tigrean People's Liberation fighters (TPLF). As a footnote, the author reveals to his readers that since the Ethiopian forces fighting in Eritrea were disorganized, the famous journalist Ba'lu Girma, based on his firsthand observation, gave a clear prediction to the Ethiopian forces that the future of overtaking Eritrea was ended (or Ormaye in Italian). This message was too bitter a medicine for Mengistu to swallow, he most probably instructed the National Security Force to get rid of Ba'lu.

With the dismantling of the Soviet Union into numerous republics in 1985, socialist Ethiopia could not get war materials and supplies. In line with Ba'lu's projection, the Ethiopian Army was completely wiped off of Eritrea soil. And with the complete defeat of the Ethiopian army by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) in 1991,

Mengistu, on the month he was born, made a plan to flee to Kenya. Subsequently, he ended up as a refugee in Zimbabwe.

Section 5, includes Chapters 14 and 15. What makes Chapter 14 exciting is that in the introductory part, the author chronicles some of the most conspicuous events that happened in Ethiopian history all in the month of May to entice his readers. For example, the author mentions the Weicahle Agreement that was concluded between Menelik II and Italy; the attempted coup against the tyrannical and dictatorial regime of Mengistu; the fleeing of Mengistu from Ethiopia to Kenya and Zimbabwe; the overthrow of the Derg's regime by the EPRDF, etc. In addition, the author, without hesitation, asserts that the coup that was attempted by senior Military officers against Mengistu's regime in May 1989, was indirectly designed by Mikhail Gorbachev. While the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev was in the process of reforming (perestroika) the Soviet Union to be more transparent (glasnost), and destabilizing other socialist countries. He found Mengistu to be more socialist than Gorbachev himself, thus, Gorbachev had no choice but to deny Mengistu the financial aid and material supplies that he asked for.

The author also discusses the pivotal role that he played in sabotaging the coup that was attempted against the Mengistu regime by senior military officers (May, 1989) mainly from Addis Ababa and Asmara. As stated by the author, the coup d'état was mainly planned not only to oust Mengistu from power while he was on state visit to East Germany but also to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Eritrean Liberation fighters. In addition, the author claims that while being behind the scenes, he was able to save a number of Tigreans from being slaughtered by the brutality of Mengistu's cliques because irrespective of their political opinions, all Tigreans were suspected to be supporters of the Tigrian People's Liberation Force.

Chapter 15, discusses token peace negotiations that Mengistu attempted to resolve some nagging issues in Ethiopia, and indicates how in the final hours Mengistu repented and embarked on a plan for Ethiopia to have a mixed instead of a socialist or command economy that precipitated a complete disaster for the Ethiopian economy as a whole.

After indicating that a number of socialist countries such as Russia and China, Tanzania, etc. were abandoning the socialist system, it is interesting that the author still advocates that there was nothing wrong the socialist philosophy as mode of production and fair distribution provided Ethiopia had pursued it rationally by maintaining stability and restraining Mengistu's arrogance and obstructionism.

In his conclusion, the author was honest enough to argue that the revolution that emancipated Ethiopia in 1974 was not initiated by the Derg but was given to the Derg to

administer. However, as said by the author, the Ethiopian People's Party (EPRP) engineered the "White Terror" to force the Derg, without the military administering it, to establish the Ethiopian People's Democracy. The Meison group on the other hand, with critical cooperation with the Derg, preferred to reform the existing bureaucracy and to expand public education to raise the political consciousness of the Ethiopian masses. Given this scenario, the author argues that the Derg had no other choice but to stay in power to maintain Ethiopia's unity and sovereignty through its Ethiopian Socialism agenda.

Some skeptics view that the author's apology for the atrocities committed during the Derg era is a distorted plea to the country. However, having thoroughly read his book, I can testify that the author is sincere and truthful. Since the author loved his country, he had to survive in a constrained political space by entertaining and flattering the then Chairman Mengistu. In retrospect, however, the author openly says that Chairman Mengistu was too arrogant and repulsing to accept genuine advice from fellow Ethiopians or foreign advisors. For example, on the Eritrean issue, the author from firsthand experience tells the reader that Mengistu would never bend from his conviction that 'it is a mistake to negotiate with the Eritrean separatist fighters.'

Though candidly put, the author blames the United States for abandoning its former ally, Ethiopia. He argues that the United States began assisting Somalia during the Somali incursion of Ethiopia in order to access Somalia bases in the Red Sea. Finally, negating his previous communistic view, now the author whole heartedly stands for democracy and is an advocate for the rules of law.

Review:

The author, Colonel Fisseha Desta has written a superb book that is well-documented with detailed references. The book moves its readers along easily from one chapter to the next. In order to entice his readers, the author begins each chapter of the book with highly relevant quotations and poems, by well-known writers. Given the author's sense of humor, he tries to energize and remind his readers of nostalgic memories by quoting familiar songs, sung by Ethiopian celebrities. The book is very readable and accessible to the non-specialist because it uses simple words rather than the heavily loaded political slogans that were common during the Derg's period.

More specifically, the author has made the purpose of his book clear and convincing by entitling it, "Fisseha's Reminiscences of the Ethiopian Revolution." Using primary and secondary sources of information, the contents of the book illuminate Fisseha's memory of

the Ethiopian Revolution from the start until he was finally removed from the Derg because he was either “sick” or had to be reshuffled for retirement because his cajoling of Mengistu was not needed anymore.

Most importantly, unlike the writings of other prominent people of the Derg’s era, the author clearly elucidates not only the most important contributions of the Derg but also apologizes honestly for the blunders that were committed during the Derg period which was like hell. Furthermore, the author paints a vivid picture of heretofore unknown, inhuman atrocities committed during the Derg’s era.

Regarding rigor which connotes carefulness and the degree of exactitude in writing a book, the author as a participant/observer demonstrates that he was a good record keeper. All sources of information, except with minor typographic errors with the footnoting (please refer to footnote, 17-19 on page 42-48), the content of the book was systematically documented. The author has consulted the writings of famous historians and political scientists. At times, the writing style of the author seems to indicate that rather than being an active participant, he gives the impression that he was an aloof or third party observer. By and large, the writing style of the author demonstrates that the author was an excellent observer. The author’s level of participation in a number of political activities within the Derg, entangled with inefficient bureaucracy is clearly demonstrated and presents new information and evidence. Being the primary source of information, the author has enabled his readers to get new insights into the Derg’s hidden activities. By and large, the conclusion he reached at the end of the book is in line with his purpose for writing the book. As a result, the author’s level of analysis is outstanding.

As the title indicates, the content of book is supposed to be a full documentation of the writer’s experience. At times the author documents other writers’ opinions rather than describing vividly his own. The book is supposed to be an illustration of his inner impression from the Derg’s camp rather than giving us the opinion of others though they might have been well documented. For example, the “Berhane Meskel Redda’s interrogative reports” which the author claims to have gotten from the documents stored in the archive of the Derg’s National Security Office are likely to be unreliable and fictitious since most of the documents collected by the then Head of the Derg’s National Security Office were not true but were mainly written to make Mengistu happy and the note takers could stay alive and in power. Thus, it is likely to say that some serious errors might have been committed, because the author, without cross checking with other documents or interviewing other reliable sources, solely depended on the documents submitted to him by the then National Security office to include in his memoir.

I am sure the author's organizational commitment or his consciously or unconsciously forgetting unwanted memories might have influenced his writing style. For example, given the oppressive nature of the Derg's system and his life in prison for 20 years, four months and six days (p.576) during the currently in power, the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (PRDF), might have restrained him from fully verbalizing some of the hideous atrocities committed during the Derg's era. Nonetheless, I am glad to see that the content of the book and the conclusions drawn are derived from actual data and not from the author's subjective or emotional values. In addition, the book is parsimonious or simple enough because the author tries to explain every phenomenon in a very easy way to understand.

In the final analysis, it would be fair and exact to suggest to the author that the book could have been more robust if some of the chapters were either shortened or further edited to keep the book more concise and to the point. Otherwise, when compared with other books that have been written by Derg members that I have read, I fully assert that Fisshea's book is different from the general understanding that we had about the Derg's period and has made a vital contribution to the study of Ethiopian history, public administration and politics. Therefore, the book should be of value to policy makers, students, and scholars. Given this, I hope the readers of Fisshea's book will find it to be inspirational, motivational, and will help us envision for the future a better democratic Ethiopia.

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