

Comrade Kassa Kebede: put up or shut up

A commentary on Kassa Kebede's ESAT interview

Dilwenberu Nega

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Derg's preeminent champagne socialist, Comrade Kassa Kebede, is on a publicity stunt, after a six year hiatus from active politicking. He is, perhaps, testing the waters before he becomes the comeback kid of cash strapped and demoralized former WPE kakitocrats.

However, his recent recorded interview with EAT's chat show host, Sisay Agani, has already been met with heated arguments by Ethiopians abroad. When someone questioned ESAT's wisdom in offering oxygen of publicity to "someone accused of treason" at an Ethiopian favorite hang out in north London last weekend, raw emotions quickly turned to an all out brawl.

This interview is not the first incident -and by the look of things, nor will it be the last incident – to cause antagonism between Kassa and Ethiopians. Some years ago, Kassa was the cause among branded Ethiopia's literati, following the publication of Yossef Bodansky's "Bin Laden: The Man who declared war on America" (ISBN 0-7615-198). The author – an Israeli-American political scientist who served as Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of the US House of Representatives from 1988 to 2004 – exposed Kassa's traitorous link with Osama Bin Laden's 1996to1998 plan **“to dismember Ethiopia into mini-Islamist states.”**

Kassa has, so far, failed to clear his name in a US court room. It may be that he has received legal advice not to do so, for he has more to lose than the author. It's commonsense, is it not, that such an eminent person like Yossef Bondansky will not risk his reputation and money by publishing egregious lies about Kassa Kebede. The most Kassa could come up with by way of damage limitation, was to showcase his loutish rudeness by engaging in a smear and sneer campaign against an Ethiopian whistleblower who dared touch "Kassa the Untouchable."

Therefore, for him to engage in a publicity stunt while his name was still heavily implicated in high treason, only goes to prove that Kassa has become a victim of exalted imagination.

If it was not for ESAT's shabby and shoddy journalism, the public could have benefited from a grilling of Kassa on two burning questions which are of interest to all Ethiopians: Has he ever been Mossad's man in Addis? Did he connive with Osama Bin Laden and Sudan's Hassan al Turabi to – as one Ethiopian coined it – “Burundonize” Ethiopia into mini-Islamist states?” What ESAT had, instead, offered to viewers was Kassa's monotonous recital of “I-said-so-and-I-did-so.”

He was, indeed, asked if he had ever been on Mossad's payroll, but Kassa replied with embellished truths by telling us that the only reason why people brand him as Mossad's mole was because he was educated in Israel, spoke Yiddish fluently and had Israeli friends in high places. This is an insult to the intelligence of Ethiopians, for it is nothing, but unmitigated nonsense. Comrade Kassa can tell that to the marines.

If Ethiopians were to suspect people of spying for Mossad, simply because they were educated in Israel, spoke fluent Yiddish, and had Israeli friends in high places, the number 1 suspect would have been the late Woizero Elizabeth Yemane who lived and studied in Israel, was married to an Israeli and was a polyglot par excellence, with her Yiddish rated as superior to Kassa's average Yiddish. Another example is good old Professor Yisak who mediated the pardon for the former leaders of Kimijit? He is a Jew and speaks flawless Yiddish and has more friends than Kassa has in high places, both in Washington and Jerusalem, but no sane Ethiopian dare link them with undercover work for Mossad.

Why is it, then, that Kassa's name as a Mossad agent in Ethiopia has been in circulation since the time of the late Emperor? No one, save Mossad and Kassa, can come up with a convincing answer. All one can dwell on at the moment is on circumstantial evidence. Kassa tells us that he was made Head of a Section when he first joined the then Ministry of Social Affairs. Given his father's social status at the time that makes him an eminent nonentity – and nothing above that. Yet, he managed to get a 24/7 Pass to the then Jubilee Palace where such passes were

granted only to senior members of the royal family, the Prime Minister and the Patriarch of Ethiopia, and not to junior civil servants like Kassa Kebede.

Why and how Kassa managed to secure this Pass is anybody's guess. All that was known at the time was that Ato Solomon Kedir, the Head of Intelligence, had raised objections on grounds that Kassa posed a security threat to the Palace, because he has been frequenting the Israeli Embassy in Addis Ababa. His objection was, however overruled by the then Minister of The Palace, Tsehafi Tezaz Teferaworq Kidane Weld, who happened to be a close friend of Kassa's father.

What, you might ask, would Kassa be doing in the Palace in those days? Add to this, the now open secret that Israel had vowed to bring down Haile Selassie's regime, when Ethiopia decided to sever its relations with Israel, and top it up further with the fact that in 1974 young revolutionaries had forced the Emperor to appoint Kassa Kebede's geriatric father – and the alleged father of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam – “Minister of The Palace,” and then you end up with a smoking gun. Thereafter, you can decide if allegations of undercover work with Mossad are compatible with his track record.

When asked about the deal he had secured between Derg and Mossad (because the return of the Jews is Mossad's remit) on the transfer to Israel of 35000 Ethiopian Jews, he was economical with the truth. While he talked confidently about his deeds as a broker – as if selling Ethiopians to the highest bidder was a great feat of achievement – he failed to seize the opportunity to clear the air off allegations that the deal had included his safe passage out of Ethiopia, Israeli citizenship and a hefty amount in kickbacks.

Where he tried to pull wool over our eyes was when he said that the EPRDF government in 1991, had first refused to accept USD 35 million from the sale of the Falashas on grounds that **“the Ethiopian in them would not allow them to accept money from the sale of their compatriots,”** but then “TPLF diverted the fund to consolidate EFFORT.” The naked truth is that EFFORT was not even established in 1991. Kassa says he is in possession of air-tight evidence to prove his claim. In which case my fraternal advice would be: **“Comrade Kassa Kebede: put up or shut up.**