

BOND WITHOUT BLOOD
A STUDY OF ETHIOPIAN-CARIBBEAN TIES, 1935-1991

VOLUME I

By

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ABSTRACT

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A number of books and articles have explored aspects of the pan-African ties between Ethiopia and the black diaspora. Although a much commendable and long overdue contribution, the works focus almost exclusively on the Italo-Ethiopian war period, and, even then, remain North America-centered for the most part. Compared to American blacks, Ethiopian connection with the West Indies has been more profound and longer lasting. Yet, there has not been a single definitive study on the Ethiopian-Caribbean ties outside the 1935-41 epoch. The purpose of this dissertation is, therefore, to fill that lacuna through a more comprehensive treatment of the subject.

Initially, the connection between Ethiopia and New World blacks centered on the Scriptural significance of the name Ethiopia, then a generic name for black Africa. Following Emperor Menelik's victory over Italy at Adwa toward the closing of the 19th century, the concept of Ethiopianism became intimately associated with the Northeast African Ethiopia. This unexpected anti-colonial triumph heralded a pan-African renaissance, and Ethiopia henceforth became a metaphor for racial pride and dignity.

The reified image of Ethiopia as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance has been, since the 1930s, overshadowed by the advent of a more direct socio-cultural contact. Given the

trans-national flow of ideas and exchange of cultural influences, contemporary Ethiopian-Caribbean relation is much more than a psychological preoccupation. This dissertation argues that both societies, despite a great physical distance, have continued to affect each other through migration, religion, secular culture, as well as through a shared history of anti-colonial activism.

This in mind, "Bond without Blood" investigates the multi-faceted nature of the twentieth-century Ethiopian-Caribbean interactions, and, in so doing, hopes to make a contribution on the ongoing debate about New World African continuities. In the five chapters ahead, the work discusses the socio-cultural and religious bases of Ethiopian and West Indian connections. Except in chapter three, where the focus shifts to Ethiopia's role in African politics, all chapters dwell on inter-continental dynamics, including the role of Ethiopian symbolism in New World liberation discourse, the impact of the Italo-Ethiopian war on the evolution of black nationalism, West Indian migration to Ethiopia, and the transplantation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Americas.

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Introduction

From a New World vantage point, Northeast Africa¹ constitutes one of the farthest corners on the African continent. Since Northeast African slaves generally went to the Middle East, there were no ancestral ties between the African Horn and the Afro-Atlantic world. However, despite the absence of physical or blood kinship, this dissertation shows that there have been compelling historic and socio-cultural ties between Ethiopians and New World blacks, hence the title "Bond without Blood." The connection between Ethiopia and black America is treated extensively in this dissertation. However, as shall be shown in subsequent chapters, it is with the Caribbean and Caribbean-born immigrants in New York and London that the Ethiopian connection has been more enduring and conspicuous, thus the subtitle "A Study of Ethiopian-Caribbean Ties, 1935-1991."

Initially, the connection between Ethiopia and overseas blacks was mostly symbolic because of the former's favorable place in the Bible and modern anti-colonial discourse. Over time, the symbolic significance has taken on an existential

¹In many geography and history texts, Ethiopia is situated in East Africa, although "East Africa," as in "East African Economic Community," generally refers to Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. "Northeast Africa" is used here instead of "East Africa" while referring to Ethiopia, in part to avoid ambiguity and in part because that is where Ethiopia is indeed located.

dimension, as in the establishment of a West Indian settlement site in Ethiopia, or the transplantation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica and Trinidad. An explanation of this intriguing trans-oceanic racial dialog requires a brief discussion of the concept of Ethiopian symbolism or Ethiopianism. J. Chirenje,² S.K.B. Asante,³ Ken Post,⁴ and William Scott⁵ have defined the concept of Ethiopianism from South African, West African, Caribbean and African-American perspectives, respectively.⁶ In a synthetic recapitulation of their writings, Ethiopianism is defined here as a set of ideas or beliefs associated with the selective reading of the Bible and Western classics, from which was forged a sense of collective historical consciousness. The Scriptural and Homeric positive

²J. Mutero Chirenje, Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1996 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

³S. K. B. Asante, Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941 (London: Longman, 1977).

⁴Ken Post, "The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica, 1930-1938," in African Perspectives, C. Alan and R. W. Johnson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 185-207.

⁵William Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁶For one of the earliest, if not the earliest, scholarly essay on Ethiopianism, see George Shepperson's "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism," Phylon 14, 1 (1953), pp. 9-18.

presentations of Africa, which sharply contrasted with the Euro-American perception of Africa as heathen and savage, provided the means for a celebratory self-identification. Ethiopia, as used in such literary texts as the King James Bible, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, or Herodotus's History, was not just a generic name for Sub-Saharan Africa, but also conjured up a powerful mythology, which became the basis for the 19th-century discourse on freedom and racial equality.⁷

In the New World, Ethiopianist themes were generally expressed in three forms: eschatological, migratory and emancipatory. In the "Ethiopian Manifesto" and the "Appeal," Robert Young and David Walker shared a messianic vision in which they foresaw black redemption through divine providence. Their pamphlets, which came out in 1829 spaced apart by several months, believed the millennium was at hand. They reminded their readers that, reminiscent of the Israelites' final days in Egypt, divine justice would prevail on the side of the weak and the downtrodden, and that black slaves would rise up and overthrow their white masters.⁸ Besides slave spirituals and sermons, in which similar eschatological sentiments were subtly expressed, Ethiopianist

⁷Frank M. Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience (Cambridge, Mas.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁸Herbert Aptheker, ed., A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States vol. 1. (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), pp. 90-97.

millenarian ethos were evident in slave revolts. Nat Turner, the mastermind of the notorious slave uprising in Virginia, was a literate slave whose militant racial stance was reinforced by a close reading of the Old Testament.⁹ Some of the Caribbean slave heroes, among them the Jamaican Sam Sharpe, a Baptist preacher who died on the gallows for his leadership role in the 1831 Christmas rebellion, also drew hope and inspiration from the Bible.¹⁰

Migration to Africa provided another course for the possible realization of Ethiopianist dreams, albeit a controversial one. During the first half of the 19th century, tens of thousands of American and Caribbean blacks left for West Africa, supported by the American Colonization Society. While abolitionists criticized the ACS's resettlement project as a pro-slavery tact to keep America white, some of the returnees saw repatriation as a divine design to spread Christianity in Africa. However genuine the motive, the latter view was superficial. While the missionary zeal indicated a genuine interest to save African souls, on the whole it revealed a naive understanding about the continent, suggesting that Ethiopianist thoughts were not totally free

⁹Stephen B. Oates, The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

¹⁰Robert J. Stewart, Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation Jamaica (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), pp. 149-51 and 169.

of Eurocentric assumptions and Western paternalism.¹¹

The Ethiopian nomenclature as an emancipatory rhetoric was particularly common among abolitionist preachers, whose sermons often implored the prophetic verse of Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God." Not surprisingly, the first independent black churches in the Americas identified themselves with the nascent Ethiopian tradition by using names that had direct reference to Africa. In the British colony of Jamaica, the first native Baptist church, founded in 1783 by an ex-slave preacher from Savannah, Georgia, bore the name Ethiopian.¹² Thanks to the Jamaican example, independent churches mushroomed on the continental mainland between the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They included the African Methodist Episcopal in Philadelphia, and the Abyssinian Baptist and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion in New York.¹³ By the latter half of the 19th century, a separatist religious tradition, known as the Ethiopian Church movement, had taken root in southern Africa, suggesting once again the universalist appeal of Ethiopianism as an incipient expression of pan-African

¹¹P. J. Staudenraus, The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

¹²Beverly Brown, "George Liele: Black Baptist and Pan-Africanist, 1750-1826," Savacou 11, 12 (1975), pp. 58-67.

¹³Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1921), pp. 73-90.

nationalism.¹⁴

Emperor Menelik's victory over Italy at Adwa in 1896 further elevated the concept of Ethiopianism. Menelik's Ethiopia, then commonly known as Abyssinia, provided two favorable factors to the Africa-centered liberation theology, indigenous Christianity and independent statehood. One of the earliest centers of evangelical activities, Northeast Africa had adopted Christianity as an official religion since the fourth century. Through its age-long association with monotheism, Abyssinia opened a more legitimate link to the Scriptural past and to such classical epics as the Solomon-Sheba saga. By identifying with Ethiopia and its mythic past, overseas blacks could thus claim an intimate kinship with the Old Testament and, through that, to a special place in ancient history.¹⁵

The news of the Adwan victory came at a time when African and African-American political fortunes were at their lowest. Since the Berlin conference of 1884, Africa had been partitioned among European powers and, given the latter's superior military force, few expected colonialism to be a short-term affair. In the United States, likewise, the 1890s marked the worst setback in the post-bellum struggle for

¹⁴Chirenje, Ethiopianism in Southern Africa.

¹⁵Edward Ullendorff, Ethiopia and the Bible (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

racial equality. In 1896, the same year in which the Adwan epic took place, the Supreme Court used the infamous Plessy V. Ferguson case to defend the ideology of white supremacy, or de guerre segregation, in the name of "separate but equal" philosophy.¹⁶ Against these backdrops of colonialism and second class citizenship, Ethiopia's military triumph over a well-armed European foe signified an imminent racial resurgence, and the far off country became henceforth an icon of freedom and a source of racial self-reassurance. Adwan mythology rendered Northeast Africa a central place in modern black thought, and Ethiopianism in this regard became the direct forebearer of 20th-century nationalist expressions, among them Garveyism, pan-Africanism, and Rastafarianism.¹⁷

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Ethiopia invoked the image of the promised land. In the same way diasporan Jews looked to Palestine, Zion, as a historic homeland, a group of racial nationalists in the New World sought repatriation to Northeast Africa on cultural, spiritual and political grounds. Although famine and civil war have characterized Ethiopia's image abroad since the seventies, the country continues to be celebrated by Rastafarians as an irreplaceable relic of history. Like the

¹⁶Brook Thomas, Plessy V. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997).

¹⁷George Berkeley, The Adowa Campaign and the Rise of Menelik (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1935).

mythical bird Sankofa, which looks back to the past for inspiration, Rastafarians find in the Ethiopianist tradition a blueprint for the future, a vision to cherish, and an ideal to strive for.

Modern Ethiopianism is, however, much more than a search for an idyllic past. Given the state-of-the-art means of communication, Ethiopia is no longer a far off abstraction, even if Ethiopian realities often coexist with Ethiopia's mythic image as a racial homeland. Modern Ethiopian-Caribbean ties are articulated by tangible historical events. The manifestation of Ethiopian art in Reggae, the Rastafarian deification of Haile Selassie, and the transplantation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the English Caribbean, are all examples of Ethiopian cultural crossovers in the New World. Inversely, black American Soul and Jamaican Reggae have spiced Ethiopian urban culture, as have their political heroes and sports icons. In other words, Ethiopians have turned to secular black culture as a mark of cosmopolitan sophistication, while West Indians have turned toward Ethiopia in search of spiritual stimulation, in the same way white Americans and Europeans have turned to India and the Orient.

"Bond without Blood" constructs the narrative of the Ethiopian-Caribbean ties with four interwoven themes in mind: pan-Africanism, black nationalism, repatriation, and

contemporary or modern Ethiopianism. Transcendent through the dissertation is both the evocative and pervasive roles of Ethiopian symbolism, the precursor of modern racial nationalism, in shaping a collective pan-African consciousness. A more deliberate focus is given, however, to the dynamics of contemporary Ethiopianism to demonstrate the presence of a two-way trans-Atlantic link. The overall unitary thesis that emerges out of this dissertation is, therefore, that contemporary Ethiopian-Caribbean relation is much more than a psychological preoccupation. Both societies, despite a great physical distance, continue to impact on each other's awareness through migration, religion, secular culture, as well as through a shared history of anti-colonial activism.

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter examines Ethiopian representations in ancient and modern intellectual traditions, and also explores some of the perennial debates in Ethiopian historiography. The second chapter investigates the Italo-Ethiopian war as a watershed point in the rise of pan-African nationalism. It explores the responses to the war by African, Caribbean and African-American intellectuals, out of which emerged the synthesis of a pan-African ideology. The third chapter discusses the role of the 1935-41 Italo-Ethiopian war as a catalyst of pan-African political consciousness in Ethiopia. It explains how

wartime political activists, among them the black nationalist Melaku Bayen and the white feminist Sylvia Pankhurst, contributed through their writings to the Ethiopians' growing sense of racial consciousness and to the subsequent transformation of Addis Ababa as a major center of pan-African politics.

Chapter four constructs the history of a small West Indian emigre community in Shashemane, a district in southern Ethiopia. It shows how the Biblical concept of the promised land was reinterpreted, or racialized, so as to reflect the Rastafarians' perception of Ethiopia as an African Zion, and of the West as "Babylon," or a land of racial captivity. Also discussed in this section is how the Rastafarians have been able to reconcile certain contradictory imageries: the association of Ethiopia with famine and poverty on the one hand, and the perception of Ethiopia as a homeland and an icon of anti-colonial freedom on the other. The last chapter discusses the transplantation process of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the West Indies. In his influential 1992 work, Africa and Africans, John Thornton has linked the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade with the end of African cultural continuities in the New World.¹⁸ By highlighting some of the contemporary Ethiopian religious crossovers in

¹⁸John Kelly Thornton, Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

the Americas, chapter five not only disagrees with Thornton's thesis, but also reinstates Africa's ongoing significance to the acculturation process of the Afro-Atlantic world.

As for methodology, the study incorporates archival research, oral interviews, secondary and primary sources, informal discussions and observations. The archival research was carried out at the headquarters of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the EOC records office are several dossiers dealing with the Church's overseas evangelical activities. The dossiers mostly consist of letters of correspondence, and receipts of financial remittances from the Patriarchate to its branches in the New World. Since documents were not allowed to be photocopied, relevant materials had to be procured by reading the needed texts into a tape recorder.

Together with archival materials, interviews with former EOC officials constitute the means by which the history of the Ethio-Caribbean religious ties has been constructed. Such interviews were conducted with Ato Abera Jembere of Ethiopia, Archbishop Yesehaq of New York, and with Kes Garnet Springer of Trinidad and Tobago. Informal discussions were also held with the two Ethiopian resident priests in the West Indies--Bishop Thadimos of Trinidad, and Aba Zenawi of Tobago.

The Rastafarian settlers in Shashemene have been

repeatedly approached by journalists, academics and film makers. This has created an interview-fatigue syndrome around the community as few are now willing to be interviewed formally. Most of the data on the emigre community for this study is derived from written sources but is also complemented by personal observations and informal talks the author had with some of the settlers. Of the Rastafarian immigrants in Addis Ababa, three volunteered for interviews and their information has helped supplement the findings in Shashemene.

Written sources for this study were collected over a five-year period. Kes Gebre-Amlak, a Trinidadian of East Indian extraction, provided a collection of local newspaper articles on the Church; while Trevor Millett, now a journalist for the Trinidad Guardian, made available a copy of his master's thesis on the same subject. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies provided access to an array of national publications, including News and Views and several Amharic periodicals. In the US, Michigan State University's library became the source for most the primary and secondary materials in English, while major Caribbean newspapers of the 1930s-1960s were made available in microfilm through the interlibrary loan system.

This study is conceptualized within the overall theoretical framework of Afrocentrism. For the most part,

African history has been the history of outsiders in Africa-- of the Semites and brown-skinned Hamites, whose supposed origins lay in Asia; of the Muslim Arabs; or of white missionaries and explorers. Likewise, the literature on colonial Africa is a study of either the European presence in Africa, or the Africans' reactions to it. The Afrocentric theory presents an alternative view to these European and Asian-centered approaches.

Unfortunately, in mainstream academia Afrocentrism has gained recognition more for its controversiality than for its role as a genuine field of learning. Proponents of Afrocentrism have been collectively condemned as racial romantics or black supremacists, and their works dismissed as "a feel-good history" at best and a celebration of reverse racism at worst. Orlando Patterson, a prominent sociologist at Harvard, trivializes Afrocentrism as a search for "pageants, pyramids and princes." Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a distinguished American educator, sees Afrocentrism as the Trojan horse of the 20th century, a threat to racial and cultural unity.¹⁹ Still others, such as the Wesleyan professor Mary Lefkowitz and the British writer Steven Howe, accuse Afrocentrism of having contributed little to actual knowledge because of its preoccupation with a controversial

¹⁹Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Disuniting of America (New York: Norton, 1992).

subject, namely the racial identity of ancient Egypt.²⁰

For the classicist Lefkowitz and the presidential historian Schlesinger, their anti-Afrocentrism is part of a larger national campaign against the promotion of multiculturalism and racial diversity in American universities and colleges. For many others, opposition to Afrocentrism is more of a reflex reaction than of a well-thought intellectual rebuttal. Critics have confused Afrocentrism as a belief system with Afrocentrism as a historical tool of analysis. As a belief system, Afrocentrism is no different from Marxism, Zionism or any other form of ideological isms, in which dogmas take the place of rational reasoning. As a historical tool, however, Afrocentrism is the means by which the scholar explains the past with a primary emphasis on race as a deterministic factor. In other words, race relations is to the Afrocentrist what class and gender relations are to labor and feminist historians. True, some leading Afrocentrists have made a name for themselves by engaging in polemical history, namely the cyclical debate whether ancient Egypt was black or Mediterranean. But what critics forget is that such scholars were only responding to a long-held, racially tainted and scientifically unsubstantiated assumption of

²⁰Mary Lefkowitz, Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Steven Howe, Afrocentrism: Mythical Past and Imagined Homes (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

ancient Egyptians as non-Africans. In any case, the reclaiming of Egypt as part of black Africa might be Afrocentric, but Afrocentrism itself is neither about Egypt nor about kings and queens.

Afrocentrism is defined here as a system of thoughts that treats Africans as capable agents of history, the movers and shakers of their societies. It is a theory that seeks to understand black peoples' role in history as givers and takers, initiators as well as reactors. Afrocentrism explains black peoples' history, first, in terms of their own internal social dynamics; second, in terms of the cross-cultural experiences that have shaped their collective identity and historical consciousness; and, finally, in terms of the global or external factors whose impact on Africa has been mostly negative. Afrocentrism acknowledges the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as having reversed Africa's process of evolution toward modernization, but it also recognizes Africa's contributions to world history in various aspects of human endeavor. Modern civilization is, for instance, as much the making of Africans as it is of Europeans and Asians. African labor transformed the plantation complex of the New World into the most profitable economic system ever seen. On the slaves' blood and sweat was thus born the industrial revolution, the basis for the West's

scientific and technological leadership.²¹

Transcendent through the chapters ahead is this Afrocentric approach: the treatment of Africans as agents of history. In chapter one, the historiographic treatment of the Afrocentric literature on Northeast Africa provides an alternative paradigm to the "Semitic outpost" thesis on Ethiopia. Chapter two challenges the traditional treatment of modern African nationalism as a by-product of World War II. It traces the beginning of pan-African nationalism to the 1930s, during which blacks the world over joined hands in defense of the beleaguered nation of Ethiopia. Chapter three, likewise, explains the Africanization of Ethiopian national consciousness in the 1950s in terms of continental and domestic factors. Chapter four shows how the Biblical concept of the promised land was reinterpreted, or Africanized, so as to reflect the Rastafarian self-perception as a people in captivity. Chapter five expounds on the concept of Africanisms by placing the transplantation of the EOC in the West Indies within the context of African cultural continuities.

The significance of Bond without Blood lies in three areas. First, historians have often treated Ethiopia at best as a "unique" case in Africa, or at worst as a peripheral

²¹Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

appendage to the Middle East. By revealing the historic links between Ethiopia and the black world at large, this work locates Ethiopian history within the cosmos of African history. Second, the study's interest in Ethiopian religious crossovers to the New World adds a new angle to the discussion on African continuities. Traditionally, the point of departure for the study of New World Africanisms has been West Africa, the ancestral homeland to most diasporic blacks. The inquiry into the cultural ties between Northeast Africa and the Afro-Atlantic world refocuses this West Africa-centered approach. This particular study, therefore, not only broadens the geographic dimension of the discourse on New World Africanisms, but it also paves the way for a more comprehensive treatment of the subject in the future.

In conjunction with the above point, the search for African cultural carryovers to the West had in the past dwelt exclusively in the years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the 15th to the 19th centuries. This study shows that such cross-cultural interactions not only survived beyond the slave trade but that they also continue at present. The investigation on contemporary Ethio-Caribbean links therefore demonstrates the ongoing process of cultural contacts between Africa and the New World and the impact that such cultural encounters have on both regions. Such ongoing cultural exchange between the old and the new continents in turn

exposes a problem in Thornton's recent thesis, namely his argument that New World black societies, despite initial influence from Africa, have metamorphosed overtime into an independent and self-contained cultural zone.

Finally, in its treatment of the socio-cultural interactions between two continents, Bond without Blood hopes to arouse further interest in comparative black history. More specifically, it may provoke future inquiries into such questions as: Why did the EOC in the Caribbean, despite a promising start, fail to compete with Western Christianity? How is the Rastafarian preoccupation with Ethiopia different from or similar to the Jewish concept of Aliyah, or to the black American migration to Liberia in the previous century? How do West African survivals in the New World resemble and differ from Northeast African cultural crossovers? Or, what are the similarities that nineteenth-century Africanisms have in common with contemporary Ethiopianisms?

Chapter I

Contextualizing Ethiopian Historiography

Western Perception of Ethiopia Before the 20th Century

The name Ethiopia has meant different things at different times. In the Homeric epics and in many subsequent classical writings, Ethiopia was a name used loosely to refer to the region south of Egypt and its dark-skinned and wooly-haired inhabitants. The word, which in Greek meant "sun-burned," symbolized remoteness and exoticism on the one hand, and piety and virtuousness on the other. Homer spoke of the "blameless Ethiopians," a people most favored by the Olympians, while Diodorus Siculus credited the Ethiopians as having created the art of worship and sacrifice.²²

The term Ethiopia, or its Hebrew equivalent Cush, also appeared in the Bible more than 40 times. The Hellenistic notion of Ethiopia as a vague geo-racial construct is also evident in the confusion of the word Ethiopia with the names of Sudan, Nubia and Cush in many modern Bible translations. As in the Greek classics, the role of blacks in the Bible is subject to varying interpretations. But at least on one instance, (Amos 9:7), the Ethiopians are described as having

²²Donald Levine, Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 4.

a special relationship with Yahweh. The Israelites, who saw themselves as the center of the universe, disobeyed God repeatedly and still remained the chosen race. In contrast, the distant Ethiopians were unlike the Israelites culturally or racially; yet they held a special place in God's grace, for the Host of Israel was the Host of humanity. It is this universalistic perception of God as one who transcends race and nationality that prompted Amos's rebuke of his countrymen: "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, o the children of Israel? saith the Lord."

After the introduction of Christianity to Axum in the fourth century, Ethiopia became relatively better known in Western religious circles as can be attested by letters of correspondence between the courts of Byzantium and Axum.²³ Of more direct and lasting consequence to Northeast Africa during this period was, however, Ethiopia's special significance to nascent Islam. When persecuted by the pre-Islamic authorities in Mecca for their revolutionary religious belief, some of Mohammed's early followers fled to Axum where they were received as special guests by the king. Even if the group later returned to Arabia to join in Mohammed's triumphant march on Mecca, the Hijra to Axum stood out as an important chapter in early Islamic history. In light of this favorable incident, Mohammed is said to have

²³Levine, Greater Ethiopia p. 7.

exempted Ethiopia from Jihad: "Leave the Abyssinians in peace so long as they do not take the offensive."²⁴ In theory, the decree accorded the highland nation a special status and in so doing averted a major Islamic onslaught on Ethiopia until the 16th century. In reality, however, the relationship between the Christian state and its Muslim neighbors was characterized by uneasy truce which,, in times of acute economic and political rivalries, exploded into a protracted frontier warfare.²⁵

By the early middle ages, European knowledge about Ethiopia had improved little. If anything, it had regressed backward shrouded into more obscurity and fanciful mythology. As in the Bible and the Greek classics, Ethiopia remained a fluid geo-racial entity in the minds of medieval Europe. Between the 12th and the 16th centuries, the name Ethiopia was associated with the legend of Prester John and his fabulous Christian empire. Following the Ottoman Turks' control of the trade route between Europe and the Orient in the mid-15th century, a number of European explorers were dispatched in search of the lustrous potentate, whose military help they were to solicit for the fight against Islam. Although some of the adventurers did indeed reach

²⁴Sergew Hable-Selassie, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270 (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), p. 191.

²⁵Ibid pp. 186-92.

Abyssinia, little was heard of them back in Europe. Either the Ethiopians found their artisan skills too valuable to let go of them, or they willingly settled in Ethiopia having run out of provision for the arduous trip back home.²⁶

Only after the Ethiopians themselves realized the extent of the growing Islamic threat did they feel the need for military alliance with Europe. In 1509 a message was sent to Lisbon by the regent queen in Ethiopia in which she proposed a joint military venture between the two countries.²⁷ The opening of a sea route to India only decades earlier had by now diminished Ethiopia's strategic significance, but the prospect of being the first European to establish an embassy in the court of the esteemed Prester was too great a privilege for the Portuguese to ignore.²⁸ The Lusitanian embassy arrived in Ethiopia in 1521, consisting of three individuals, among them the gifted chronicler Fr. Fransisco Alvares to whose two-volume work we owe much of our knowledge about 16th-century Ethiopia.²⁹

²⁶Levine, Greater Ethiopia pp. 7-9.

²⁷Sergew Hable-Selassie, "The Ge'ez Letters of Queen Eleni and Lebna Dingel to John, King of Portugal," Proceedings of the 4th International Ethiopian Studies Conference (Rome, 1972), pp. 547-566.

²⁸For a detailed discussion of the Ethiopian-European encounters upto the 1520s, see William Leo Hansberry's "Ethiopian Ambassadors to Latin Courts, and Latin Emissaries to Prester John" Ethiopia Observer 9 (1965), pp. 90-99.

²⁹Fransisco Alvares, The Prester John of the Indies

From Alvares's portrait of the highland villages as "big towns" and "populous," or of the land as fertile and rich in husbandry, it is clear that Ethiopia and Portugal were at a comparable level of development in the early 16th century.³⁰ The Portuguese sojourners therefore claimed no racial superiority on the basis of a more advanced economy. To the contrary, awe and veneration characterized their attitude toward the Ethiopian monarch. The first request by the travelers on reaching Ethiopia was for permission to speak with the emperor directly, to "kiss his hands," and give "great thanks to God for having fulfilled their desires in bringing Christians together with Christians."³¹

From a modern-day perspective, the absence of racial consideration in the early Ethio-Portuguese encounters appears atypical. However, it should be remembered that the ideology of white supremacy was a later-day phenomenon, a by-product of the industrial era and of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As Winthrop Jordan has pointed out in his study of the history of white racial ideology in America, religion, not race, defined the West's collective consciousness during the pre-industrial era. Because of their long protracted wars against the Muslims, Europeans regarded Christians anywhere

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

³⁰Alvares, Prester John of the Indies p. 255.

³¹Ibid p. 271.

as potential allies. The seriousness with which they entertained the story of the Prester and the folklore surrounding him made it easy for Ethiopia to be fancied as the farthest outpost of Christendom where the banner against Islam was held high.³²

This sense of religious camaraderie between African and European Christians is best illustrated by Lisbon's decision to send its soldiers to Ethiopia to help thwart an all-but successful Muslim invasion. This was in direct response to the Jihad of the 1530s, carried out by Somali and Dankali forces led by their able general, the notorious Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghazi, popularly known as Ahmed Gagn or Ahmed the left handed. Backed by Turkish soldiers and firearms, Gagn's forces had overrun most of the Christian highlands, causing much material destruction and many forcible conversions to Islam. In a final effort to save the country, Emperor Lebna Dengel appealed to his European coreligionists for military help. Although the fugitive king died in 1540 uncertain of his country's future, 400 Portuguese soldiers arrived the next year giving solace to the otherwise scattered and dispirited Christian army. While half of the European musketeers were waylaid and killed by the Muslim forces not far from the Eritrean coast, the other half made it to the

³²Winthrop Jordan, The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 33.

thick of the battle in the northern highlands where their superior firepower helped turn the tide in the Abyssinians' favor. Gagn died in 1543 in the bloodiest and decisive engagement of the war near Lake Tana, after which the Muslims retreated to their historic stronghold in the eastern lowlands.³³

The Portuguese military intervention marked both a climax and a turning point in the Ethio-Iberian relations. Until now, the Portuguese had considered the Abyssinian state as first among equals. The fact that a few hundred Portuguese troops were able to accomplish in a short while what the Ethiopians could not in a long period ended Europe's militaristic infatuation with the Prester, hence the deflation of the Ethiopian image abroad. The same period also saw the questioning of the orthodoxy of Ethiopian Christianity. Jeronimo Lobo, a Jesuit traveler of the 1620s, argued that the Ethiopians did not belong to the "true religion" because of their rejection of Christ's vicar on earth, the pope. Despite their heretic attitude to the Catholic Church, the Ethiopians were unrivaled in their piety and virtue, Lobo added as an afterthought, and did not have

³³For firsthand account of the 1541 Portuguese expedition see Richard Whiteway's Portuguese Expedition in Abyssinia in 1541-1543 as Narrated by Castanhoso (London: Hakluyt Society, 1902). For an overall account of the Portuguese period in Ethiopia, 1492-1633, see Charles Rey's The Romance of the Portuguese in Abyssinia (London: H. F. and G., 1929).

"to envy any other nation where the purity of faith is of greater perfection and excellence."³⁴ Lobo's impression characterized the sentiment of contemporary Portuguese travelers who, while appreciative of the Ethiopians' devoutness to their faith, were quick to denounce the Monophysite Church as heretic or unCatholic.

On the Ethiopian side, the Portuguese intervention provoked both friendly and hostile responses. On one side, having played a crucial role in the defeat of Gragn, the Portuguese were celebrated as national saviors by their Abyssinian hosts. In gratitude to their military valor, the soldiers were allowed to stay in the country enjoying a disproportionate religious and political influence, in effect transforming Ethiopia into a Portuguese vassal, a fact made more apparent by Emperor Susenyos's embrace of Catholicism at the turn of the 16th century.

Outside the royal court, on the other hand, resentment arose against the newcomers and their privileged status. The Jesuits were seen as a major threat by the Orthodox Church because of their growing missionary presence. The fact that many Portuguese resorted, with the help of their firearms, to the capture and sale of Ethiopians as slaves to the Middle East added more fuel to the growing anti-European

³⁴Donald Lockhart, trans., The Itinerario of Jeronimo Lobo (London: Hakluyt Society, 1984), p. 157.

xenophobia.³⁵ Finally, the backlash against the strangers sparked a strong religious nationalism which resulted in the abdication of Susenyos in favor of his son Facilidas, who in turn brought the chapter on the Portuguese interlude to an end by ordering the unconditional ejection of the foreigners.

The first European to visit Abyssinia after the 1633 Portuguese expulsion was Charles Poncet, a French medical doctor and long-time resident in Cairo. Following a formal invitation by Iyasu I, Poncet arrived in Gondar in 1699, and would stay there for nine months seeking the cure for the emperor's genetic skin ailment. Poncet's writing, like the earlier Portuguese literature on Ethiopia, not only lacked explicit racial biases but reinforced the association of Ethiopia with religious piety, thus its description of Gondar as a town of "hundred churches."³⁶ The French doctor was particularly impressed by Iyasu whom he described as "a lover of curious arts and sciences"; a man of great intelligence and undaunted bravery; and most of all as one who "has "an extraordinary love for justice, which he administers to his subjects with great exactness." Perhaps because of his familiarity to the less tranquil urban lifestyle of Cairo or

³⁵Whiteway, The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia p. 110-12.

³⁶William Foster, ed., The Red Sea and the Adjacent Countries at the Close of the 17th Century (London: Hakluyt Society, 1949), p. 122.

Paris, Poncet noted with amazement the absence of rampant crime and social unrest in Gondar. "It is somewhat surprising that, the Ethiopians being so lively and passionate, . . . we scarcely ever hear of murder or of those enormous crimes which fill us with horror."³⁷

Few could have disagreed more with Poncet's image of the just and virtuous Ethiopians than the next visitor to the country, the Scottish James Bruce. There were three factors that distinguished Bruce from earlier visitors. First, he was the first Protestant to set foot in Ethiopia. Second, he belonged to a radically different socio-economic era, the age of the industrial revolution. Third, unlike the Iberians who experienced a long history of domination by the darker Moores, 18th-century England possessed no extensive inter-racial interactions with non-European peoples. In other words, whereas the Portuguese could partially relate themselves to feudal Ethiopia and its Orthodox Church, Bruce would find his religious and economic backgrounds too dissimilar to have any appreciation for what he saw or found in Ethiopia.

Bruce's arrival in Ethiopia in 1768 also coincided with the collapse of the central government and the rise of several pretenders to the Solomonic throne, as a result of which the country was plunged into a depressing period of

³⁷Ibid pp. 130-31.

fragmentation and civil war known as the Era of Princes.³⁸ Considering the ensuing state of anarchy and violence, Bruce's portrait of Ethiopia as a Hobbesian society was not without elements of truth, even if it was magnified by his ethnocentric biases. Among the customs Bruce found particularly repulsive included the punishing of criminals and religious heretics by plucking their eyes out, cutting off their tongues and, above all, putting them to death by hanging or stoning and leaving their bodies unburied.³⁹

Nothing aroused as much sensation in Europe as did Bruce's lavish description of the Ethiopian raw beef diet, "a cannibal banquet," as he dubbed it. After bleeding it on the throat, the animal--a cow or a bull--is skinned alive. "All the flesh on the buttocks is then cut off in solid, square pieces, without bones or much effusion of blood; and the prodigious noise the animal makes is a signal for the company to sit down to table."⁴⁰

The same custom of eating raw meat was reported a century earlier by Portuguese travelers in a matter-of-fact way, but it was Bruce who filled in the details in a

³⁸For a detailed account of this era, see Mordechai Abir's Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes (New York: Praeger, 1968).

³⁹James Bruce, Travels of James Bruce Through Parts of Africa, Syria, Egypt and Arabia into Abyssinia (London: W. and R. Chambers, 1897), pp. 209-10.

⁴⁰Ibid pp. 210-12.

picturesque narrative so much so the story became incredulous even to the most ethnocentric English audience. A story was told in which Bruce, at a dinner party, was asked if he saw any musical instrument in Ethiopia. "I think I saw one lyre there," he hesitatingly answered. "Yes, there is one less since he left the country," came a whisper from one of the guests, alluding to the general perception of Bruce as a liar.⁴¹

The name Abyssinia had, by 19th century, become synonymous with violence and debauchery, especially as writings by subsequent travelers corroborated Bruce's findings of decades earlier. "The skeptic in Europe, who still withholds his credence from Bruce's account of an Abyssinian brind feast, would have been edified by the sight now presented on the royal meadow," recounted a British traveler in Shoa in the 1840s.

Crowds swarmed around each sturdy victim to the knife, and impetuously rushing with a simultaneous yell, seized horns, and legs, and tail. . . . The hide was opened in 50 places, and collop after collop of warm flesh and muscle--sliced and scraped from the bone--was borne off in triumph. "Groups of feasting savages might now be seen seated on the wet grass in every direction, greedily munching and bolting the raw repast."⁴²

A trip to Abyssinia thus became a trip in search of the

⁴¹Richard Pankhurst, Travellers in Ethiopia (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 73.

⁴²William Cornwallis Harris, The Highlands of Ethiopia (Farnborough: Gregg, 1968), vol. 2, p. 3.

exotic, the wild and the absurd. Many a traveler to the Horn tried to meet these expectations, and in the process bombarded their readers with real or imagined Abyssinian eccentricities. Cultural practices, that were either random or confined to a particular group or a small area, were blown out of proportion. Thenceforth came exaggerated reports of Ethiopian battlefield orgies such as the practice of emasculating fallen enemies or of castrating them if caught alive.⁴³ Reports also circulated that singled out Ethiopians as religious fanatics who, among other things, cut the lips and noses of smokers and snuffers.⁴⁴

By mid-19th-century both the classical and the medieval perceptions of Ethiopia had faded, its people having been painted as nominally Christians at best or as heathen and barbarous at worst. In the words of Bruce's biographer, Abyssinia was a nation of "the "wooly-headed negro, who there, as in all regions of the world, finds that his neighbor and fellow-creature, pagan as well as Christian, is a more cruel, cunning, relentless inveterate enemy, than the

⁴³Harold G. Marcus, "The Black Men who Turned White: European Attitudes towards Ethiopians, 1850-1900," Archiv Orientalni 39 (1979), p. 157.

⁴⁴Augustus Wylde, 83 to 87 in the Soudan (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), p. 330; Charles Gordon, The Journals of Major-Gen. C.G. Gordon at Khartoum (London: Darf, 1984), p. 150.

hyena and savage beasts of the field."⁴⁵

As Europe became increasingly aware of the Ethiopians' supposed unrivaled brutality to man and beast, colonial intervention in the Horn found compelling socio-political justification. An upstart Italy rose to the occasion by sending an army of more than 14,000 men to northeast Africa. Even with what seemed to be the largest colonial expedition in the continent hitherto, Italy had miscalculated Emperor Menelik's resourcefulness and resilience. On March 1, 1896, the Italian colonial mission was routed at Adwa by Menelik's bigger but poorly equipped army after a half-day battle. Rome's colonial ambition thus ended in a humiliating defeat leaving it with a bruised national ego. The defeat became overnight a traumatic national fiasco resulting in the resignation of Prime Minister Francesco Crispi.⁴⁶

Italy's defeat at Adwa had wider racial repercussions. Lest Western conventional wisdom of race and race relations become meaningless, European social Darwinists had to scramble for a plausible biological explanation for the unexpected turn of events in Africa. Abyssinians were described as black Caucasians, bestowed with generous genetic traits hitherto considered exclusively European: intelligent,

⁴⁵Francis Head, The Life of Bruce: The African Traveler (London: J. Murray, 1838), p. 127.

⁴⁶Levine, Greater Ethiopia p. 11.

handsome, courageous, persevering, proud and religious.⁴⁷ Adwa in a sense revived Europe's medieval conjuration in which the Ethiopians were seen as kindred spirits, as having more in common with their European coreligionists than with their "pagan" or Muslim neighbors. Overnight, savage Abyssinia became a fortress of Christianity, and its ancient civilization and literature aroused renewed interest among European philologists.

For the oppressed masses in Asia and Africa, Adwa had a totally different meaning. Ethiopia's victory over Italy, as did Japan's triumph over Russia nine years later, lit the torch of anti-colonial resistance. For peoples of color the world over, March 1896 became a defining moment. Adwa became a pan-African cause celebre, a metaphor for racial pride and anti-colonial defiance, a living proof that skin color or hair texture bore no significance on intellect and character. Such was Adwa's inspirational importance to blacks that several church denominations in South Africa and the United States bore the name Ethiopia or Abyssinia. Ethiopia also invoked the image of the promised land to a number of nationalistic-minded blacks some of whom migrated and settled in Northeast Africa in the early 1930s.⁴⁸

By the early twentieth century, there were thus two

⁴⁷Marcus, "The Black Men who Turned White," pp. 155-66.

⁴⁸Levine, Greater Ethiopia pp. 12-14.

tailor-made concepts of Ethiopia from which Europeans could choose as political needs dictated. During the 1930 coronation of Ras Tefari as Emperor Haile Selassie, for example, the hundreds of white dignitaries in Addis Ababa could seek consolation in the Caucasoid image of Ethiopia to convince themselves that their hosts, however swarthy in complexion, were not black Africans. Ethiopia may have been in Africa geographically, but its peoples constituted a race more Middle Eastern than African. "It is not a 'black' or Negro nation, as most people think," John Gunther would write, as recently as the 1950s. "Some of its people are black like Vulcan, and some have Negroid blood, but Ethiopians most distinctly do not think of themselves as Negro or Negroid."⁴⁹

At the subliminal level, however, the perception of Ethiopia as "barbarous" and "mysterious" still held a great sway on public opinion. One book published in 1927 bore the title of Savage Abyssinia and was reprinted eight years later with an equally ominous heading as Unknown Ethiopia: New Light on Darkest Abyssinia.⁵⁰

Negative publications of the above type, it should be

⁴⁹John Gunther, Inside Africa (New York: Harper, 1955), p. 252.

⁵⁰James Edwin Baum, Savage Abyssinia (New York: J.H. Sears and Company, 1927); James Edwin Baum, Unknown Ethiopia: New Light on Darkest Abyssinia (New York: J.H. Sears and Company, 1935).

added here, were particularly popular among European anti-slavery lobbyists who, by drawing attention to Ethiopia's poor human rights record, tried to block the country's entry into the League of Nations. Ironically, the practice of forced labor in the colonial territories was much more brutal and widespread than Ethiopian domestic servitude, but the same self-ordained pro-African advocates never challenged the legitimacy of the British or of the French colonial presence in the continent. On the contrary, European anti-slavery activists and Italian fascist operatives collaborated in turning the issue of slavery in Ethiopia into an urgent moral crisis that needed immediate redress. The "civilizing mission," the natural complement to such pseudo-humanitarian rhetoric, thus provided an ideal pretext for Italy to intervene in Ethiopia militarily in the name of bringing peace and civilization.⁵¹

Modern Ethiopian Historiography

After World War II there was a leap in terms of what was known about Ethiopia in Western academia, ironically thanks to the extensive research undertaken by Italian

⁵¹As an example of the fascists' anti-Ethiopian propaganda literature, see Giulio Cesare Bravelli, Abyssinia: The Last Stronghold of Slavery (London: British-Italian Bulletin, 1936).

scholars during the five-year fascist interlude. The first international Ethiopian studies conference was in fact held in Rome in 1959, a testament to the ingenuity of Italian scholarship.⁵² However, although Western understanding of Ethiopia had become more complex by now, the pious-savage dichotomy still dominated post-war European thinking. On one hand, Westerners found in Ethiopia an apparent projection of themselves. Ethiopia possessed a rich culture and an ancient history dating back to biblical times, while its leadership under an enlightened monarch promised great economic potentials like that of 19th-century Japan. On the other hand, following the 1974 overthrow of the Haile Selassie government by a Marxist junta, the same country came to signify Africa's vulnerability to apocalyptic famine and perpetual civil strife. Disturbing televised images of massive starvation revived the colonial perception of Africans as dependent and child-like and threatened even more than it symbolize the political and economic bankruptcy of communism in the Third World.⁵³

This dual perception of Ethiopia--at times civilized, at times antithetical to civilization--is what defines the

⁵²See Proceedings of the 1st International Ethiopian Studies Conference (Rome, 1959).

⁵³For a moving account of the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine, see Myles Harris, Breakfast in Hell: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account of the Politics of Hunger in Ethiopia (New York: Poseidon Press, 1987).

perennial academic debate in Ethiopian history. Ethiopian historiography has taken the form of a Manichaean discourse: Caucasian or Negroid, backward or civilized, ancient or recent, transplanted or indigenous, feudal or non-feudal. These contentions in turn are what shape the basis of the three major historiographic debates on Ethiopia: Semiticist, deconstructionist, and secessionist.

The Semeticist School

Most of the pre-1974 historical writings on Ethiopia can best be categorized as a European-centered, Semiticist historiography. A central theme shared among Ethiopianists of this period was the celebration of the country's past: the glory of Axum, the triumph of Christianity over Islam, and Ethiopia's survival as a unitary state in the face of repeated colonial onslaughts. The Semiticist historians, whose works eulogized Ethiopia's past, were mostly Europeans. Their scholarship served a double purpose. First, it interpreted Ethiopian history in such a way that it was palatable to a larger European audience. Second, because of its assumption of European value system as the universal standards, it purveyed a European world view to Ethiopia and made future Ethiopian Ethiopianists ever more dependent on European thought and psychology for the analysis of their

national history.

As mentioned earlier, the myth of Prester John had elevated Ethiopia's standing in medieval Europe. The Semiticization of Ethiopian identity, heir to the exotic but pious Ethiopia image, began in the 17th century by the German philologist Hiob Ludolf. Analysis of linguistic similarities between Ge'ez and Arabic underscored Ludolf's theory that the Abyssinians were semitic immigrants from Asia.⁵⁴ His hypothesis was later reaffirmed by a coterie of 19th and 20th Semiticists. They included the German August Dillmann and Enno Littmann; the British Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, G. W. B. Huntinford, and C. F. Beckingham; the Polish-born Edward Ullendorff; the American sociologist Donald Levine; and, most importantly, the Italian Carlo Conti-Rossini.⁵⁵

Conti-Rossini, the single most influential Ethiopianist Semiticist, appreciated Ethiopia's diverse ethnic makeup and called the country a "museum of people." His greatest influence came from his investigation of northern Ethiopia whose material culture and linguistic roots he traced to Southern Arabia. The result of his extensive field work in the region, Storia d'Etiopia, became the authoritative work on the subject with a profound influence on subsequent

⁵⁴Hiob Ludolf, A New History of Ethiopia (London: Samuel Smith, 1684).

⁵⁵Teshale Tibebu, The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1876-1974 (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1995), p. XIII and pp. XVI-XXI.

scholarship.

Monroe and Jones,⁵⁶ Yuri Kobishchanov,⁵⁷ Francis Anfray,⁵⁸ and Taddesse Tamrat,⁵⁹ to mention a few, have expounded on Conti-Rossini's Semitic hypothesis by drawing a direct axis between South Arabian and Axumite civilizations. At least four major phases are discernable in classical Ethiopian civilization according to the aforementioned Ethiopianists. First, around the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. there took place a large scale migration of people from Saba, one of the Yemenite kingdoms in Arabia, to the Northeast African plateau. The Sabaeans brought with them an advanced material and political culture, and in so doing transformed the coastal village of Adulis as a major commercial port conversant with Hellenistic culture and the Jewish faith.⁶⁰

Second, instead of confining themselves to the coastal region, the colonial immigrants settled in Axum where the

⁵⁶A. H. M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, A History of Ethiopia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

⁵⁷Yuri Kobishchanov, Axum (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979).

⁵⁸Francis Anfray, "The Civilization of Aksum from the First to the Seventh Centuries," in General History of Africa, vol. 2. (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), pp. 362-80.

⁵⁹Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia: 1270-1527 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

⁶⁰Yuri Kobishchanov, Axum pp. 24-27.

highland climate was mild and the land fertile. They intermarried with the Kushitic-speaking natives on whom they superimposed a Semitic tongue and "a fully developed civilization." They introduced the know-how of metallurgy and sculpture, various domestic animals and plants, agricultural and irrigation techniques, a writing system, religious and political institutions, and in so doing turned Axum into "the diffusion center" of a new civilization."⁶¹

Third, in the first six centuries after the birth of Christ, Axum reached its peak as a major maritime power. This period saw the transformation of the Sabeian cultural crossovers into distinctly Axumite innovations, as in the modification of the boustrophedon, or the plough-like Sabeian writing system, into standard Ge'ez scripts. The two world religions, Christianity and Islam, were introduced to Ethiopia at this time, setting the stage for the subsequent internecine religious conflict that sparked Axum's southward flight.⁶²

Fourth, the orientation away from the Arabian sea in the latter half of the first millennium marked the end of the Axumite golden age. By the 10th-century the Axumites were

⁶¹J. S. Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (London: Frank Cass, 1965), pp. 32-33.

⁶²Tekle-Tsadiq Mekouria, "Christian Aksum," General History of Africa, vol. 2. (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), pp. 401-422.

ousted by Kushitic usurpers known as the Zagwe Dynasty. Cut off from a meaningful contact with the civilized world and encircled by hostile Islam, Ethiopia, in the words of Ullendorff, henceforth reverted to "a long period of darkness."⁶³ "Encompassed by the enemies of their religion," also wrote the 18th-century Edward Gibbon, "the Ethiopians slept a thousand years forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten."⁶⁴

Although, as shown above, the study of Axum normally falls within the confines of Ethiopian historiography, its overall significance to African history extends beyond the national boundary. It was a commonly held view until a few decades ago that the interlacustrine kingdoms of east Africa were the distant progenies of Axum. The Hamitic myth, a variant of the Semitic thesis, claims that some of the peoples of east and central Africa, namely those with divine kingship traditions and with relatively sharper physical features and lighter complexion, are descendants of the Asiatic immigrants in northeast Africa.⁶⁵ Although long since discredited, the Hamitic thesis continues to serve as a

⁶³Edward Ullendorff, The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and Peoples (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 2.

⁶⁴Quoted in Ullendorff's Ethiopians p. 55.

⁶⁵J. E. G. Sutton, "Ethiopian Echoes in East Africa: Fact and Fantasy," Proceedings of the 3rd International Ethiopian Studies Conference (Addis Ababa, 1963) pp. 128-35

marker of social and cultural identity. A classic case is in Rwanda where the supposedly taller and lighter skinned Tutsi attribute to themselves an Ethiopian origin and see themselves as the aristocratic class. Although both Tutsi and Hutu shared the same language and culture, their class and social distinctions were further exploited and stratified by Belgian officials through the colonial dictum of divide and rule. Following the withdrawal of Belgium from Rwanda after independence, the competition for political dominance between the two rival groups would on two occasions escalate into a genocidal civil war claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians on both sides.

In Ethiopia the ethnic tension between the supposedly Semitic-speaking immigrant groups and the Kushitic-speaking natives is nowhere as acute as what was seen between the allegedly Hamitic tutsi and the non-Hamitic Hutu. All the same, the Semiticist interpretation of the Ethiopian past has created a great divide in the way Ethiopians perceptualize their ethnic identities. Inherent in the Axumite paradigm is a European world view which treats the Asian immigrants as shakers and movers, and the indigenous Kushitic, Omotic and Nilotic-speaking Africans as passive receivers. No where is this Eurocentric bias against the Kushites more evident than in Edward Ullendorff's seminal work: The Ethiopians.

The Polish-born Ethiopianist introduces his book as a

study of the "historic Abyssinia and the cultural manifestations of its Semitized inhabitants."⁶⁶ Ullendorff describes the Kushitic Oromo, a major population group, as a barbarian horde who brought wanton destruction on the Ethiopian landscape. "The Gallas had little to contribute to the Semitized civilization of Ethiopia; they possessed no significant material or intellectual culture, and their social organization differed considerably from that of the population among whom they settled," Ullendorff argues. "If there was one major factor that held Ethiopia backward and poor, it was the Oromo migration of the 16th century. "They were not the only cause of the depressed state into which the country now sank, but they helped to prolong a situation from which even a physically and spiritually exhausted Ethiopia might otherwise have been able to recover far more quickly."⁶⁷

The Deconstructionist School

Ullendorff's dismissive and bigoted scholarship provoked new ideas that soon became the counter thesis to conventional wisdom. A deconstructionist interpretation of the Ethiopian past began in the 1960s, reaching full blossom

⁶⁶Ullendorff, Ethiopians p. VIII.

⁶⁷Ibid p. 73.

in the seventies. Its proponents were politically-inclined leftist intellectuals, most of them veterans of the radical student movement. Traditional historiography might have provided a glorific, if romantic, narrative of the Solomonid past, but it did not explain present reality, Ethiopia's economic and political underdevelopment. For the younger and more ambitious group of Ethiopianists, Class analysis replaced Semitic philology as the more appropriate historical cannon as can be drawn from the works by John Markakis,⁶⁸ Addis Hiwet,⁶⁹ Donald Donham⁷⁰ and Bahru Zewde.⁷¹

Deconstructionists saw Ethiopia's imperial dynasty and its landed nobility as representative of a feudal mode of production that was exploitative and obsolete even by African standards. Traditional institutions such as the monarchy and the clergy, once beheld as a sign of a more complex and advanced society, now symbolized oppression and backwardness, and Ethiopia, the museum of ethnicity, now became Ethiopia the prison of nationalities.

⁶⁸John Markakis and Nega Ayele, Class and Revolution in Ethiopia (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1978).

⁶⁹Addis Hiwet, Ethiopia, from Autocracy to Revolution (London: Review of African Political Economy, 1975).

⁷⁰Donald Donham, Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁷¹Bahru Zewde, A History of Modern Ethiopia (London: J. Currey, 1991).

The Secessionist School

There is no one single deconstructionist school of thought on Ethiopian history, however. From the outset, the deconstructionist school embodied inconsistencies and self-contradictions. The secessionist perspective was for instance an offshoot of the deconstructionist school which found itself at loggerheads with the pro-unity Marxist radicals. While the latter explained Ethiopia's power dynamics from class perspective and sought to forge a new but no-less centralized government under the guidance of socialism, the former placed the "nationality question" at the center of its agenda insisting on the exigency of self determination. Whereas deconstructionists accepted the Semiticists' portrait of Ethiopia as an ancient polity, secessionists denied the existence of a historic Ethiopian state altogether. The Oromo Liberation Front, for example, saw Ethiopia as a hundred-year-old colonial invention. Its literature, as exemplified by Sisai Yibssa's Invention of Ethiopia and Asafa Jalata's Oromo Nationalism, traced the emergence of the Ethiopian state to the late 19th-century, the period in which Menelik, supported by European firearms, conquered and forcefully annexed much of present-day southern Ethiopia.⁷²

⁷²Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Yibssa, The Invention of

Like their Oromo counterparts, Eritrean nationalists rejected the traditional Ethiopian historiography and, with it, the "three-thousand-year" image of Ethiopian statehood. The so-called historic Abyssinia was a loose amalgam of independent chiefdoms without a constant power center and without fixed boundaries, they argued. The Eritrean highlands might have been at times annexed by their southern neighbors, but for the most part the region remained either independent or under the control of foreign powers such as the Ottoman Turks, the Egyptians and, subsequently, the Italians and the British. Eritrea, in other words, had never been an integral part of the Ethiopian state and Ethiopia's irredentist claim owned no legitimate historical basis.⁷³

Oromo and Eritrean nationalist historiographies have been smartly crafted to fit the mold of liberation theology, whose call for ethnic self-determination may at first seem fair and reasonable. It has been easy, moreover, for Oromo scholars to claim a high moral ground as their studies have

Ethiopia (Trenton, Red Sea Press, 1990); Asafa Jalata, Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1998).

⁷³Eritrean nationalism has produced a prolific literature albeit with a repetitive and predictable self-justificatory theme. One such recent publication is Ruth Iyob's Eritrean Independence Struggle: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For an earlier treatment of the same subject by well-known Eritrean ideologues see the compiled work by Basil Davidson and others, Behind the War in Eritrea (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1980).

historicized, in theory at least, the cultural areas which the Semiticists had once dubbed ahistorical. However, this is only one side of the story. Ethnology and cultural anthropology, relatively recent phenomena in Ethiopia, are often carried out by surrogate intellectuals whose anti-Ethiopian biases are dictated by their membership in ethnic liberation fronts. Not surprisingly, a large chunk of the ethnographic studies on Ethiopia since the late eighties has been polemic and agenda-driven. Paul Baxter's Being and Becoming an Oromo and Jordan Gebremedhin's Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea are only two fine examples where the line between ethnography and ethnic propaganda has grown ever fuzzier.⁷⁴

In the last decade, Ethiopian studies has in fact become so ethnicized that Eritrean and Oromo nationalists have decided to form separate academic associations. Although open to all, Ethiopian studies conferences have been boycotted by the two groups. Similarly, the North America-based Oromo and Eritrean studies associations, which are often made up of partisan intellectuals and Western sympathizers, have consistently excluded mainstream Ethiopianists in their annual conferences, depriving

⁷⁴Jordan Gebremedhin, Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea: A Critique of Ethiopian Studies (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989); Paul Baxter and others, Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquiries (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1996).

themselves of the type of intellectual dialog vital to the health and progress of any respectable academic discipline. The result has been the increasing polarization of Ethiopian studies along ethnic and, to a small degree, ideological lines, hence the failure of Ethiopian historiography to contribute meaningfully toward a coherent understanding of the country's past.

The Pan-Ethiopianist Response

For mainstream Ethiopianists, OLF's secessionist discourse represents a regression to primordialism, while the Eritreans' go-it-alone attitude indicates a dangerous sense of self-delusion. Ethiopian identity, most Ethiopianists argue, is a concrete reality, notwithstanding the various contentions on the processes of the Ethiopian state formation. They reckon on the other hand that rejection of Ethiopian identity has not been a mere abstract expression on the part of the disaffected groups. Eritrea has gained independence after thirty years of bloody war, and the OLF is still at large as a guerilla movement.

Uncertainty about their country's future in light of the ongoing ethnic strifes has created among Ethiopians an introspective tradition, a soul-searching process into their country's past. Popularly read Ethiopian magazines are

replete with articles about the meaning of "Ityopiawinet" or Ethiopian citizenship. "Ethiopia is greater than the sum of its parts," goes a common pan-Ethiopian saying. Advocates of a greater Ethiopia see Ethiopian identity as more than a mere geographical expression. Through intermarriage, trade and cultural exchange, Ethiopians have been fused into an indivisible whole regardless of ethnicity and religious persuasion. Ethiopian citizenship is not a zero-sum game in which one wins and the other loses; it is the common good for the common all.

To lend historical credence to this emergent pan-Ethiopian spirit, younger scholars such as Teshale Tibebu and Ayele Bekerie have taken to task both the Semiticist historiography and its deconstructionist/secessionist contenders. Although Tsegaye Gebremedhin, Ethiopia's leading poet laureate and dramatist, had long produced plays and essays with explicit pan-Ethiopian and pan-African themes, his contributions were generally seen as anathema to traditional historiography and given little scholarly value. Through their association with the Philadelphia-based Temple University, a major black studies center, Teshale and Ayele have gained visibility in the Afrocentric circle and their works, in some ways a reinforcement on Tsegaye's earlier thesis, have appeared in major book stores such as Barnes and Nobles.

In his introductory chapter to The Making of Modern Ethiopia, as well as in an article in the Journal of Black Studies, Teshale denounces both the "Orientalist-Semiticist" and the secessionist paradigms of Ethiopian historiography.⁷⁵ Of the latter he writes, "The so-called 'Black colonialism' or 'participation in the scramble for Africa' ascribed to Ethiopia is based on an amazing ignorance of or deliberate indifference to the history of state formation in 19th-century Africa." According to Teshale, Menelik's imperial march to southern Ethiopia, the scholarly basis of the Oromo anti-Ethiopian discourse, was characteristic of an ongoing state formation process in Africa, itself a reaction to the growing European encroachment in the continent. Like the upcoming kingdoms of Buganda and Zulu, or the Fulani empire of Sokoto, Menelik's southward expansion was part of a larger African scene. "If, indeed, what makes Menelik a Black colonialist is the fact that he more than doubled the territory and population under his rule, then, obviously, Shaka should be 50 times more colonialist than Menelik because he expanded the territory and people subject to his rule by a factor of more than 100."⁷⁶

The Orientalist-Semiticists genre, unlike the

⁷⁵Teshale Tibebu, "Ethiopia: The Anomaly and Paradox of Africa," Journal of Black Studies 26, 4 (1996), pp. 414-30.

⁷⁶Teshale, "Ethiopia: The Anomaly and Paradox of Africa" pp. 421-22.

secessionist literature, has contributed a great deal of knowledge on various aspects on Ethiopia. But as Teshale hastens to add, such were also the racist assumptions of the Semiticists through their writings gave rise to fundamental misconceptions and stereotypic images. Westerners on one hand described Ethiopians as a nation of handsome people, religious, hospitable and valorous in battle. On the other hand, they identified Ethiopia as the "other": hostile, mysterious, primitive and xenophobic. "Ethiopia unknown to the West became the unknown Ethiopia. Ethiopia isolated from the West became the isolated Ethiopia. A deceptive Amhara became the deceptive Amhara."⁷⁷

When Europe was in total darkness about Africa and Asia, the Orientalists served a go-between role as producers of knowledge about the East, at least from a Western vantage point. As the world has grown smaller through the advent of the jet engine and instant electronic communication, the Orientalist have long outlived their usefulness as agents of Western intellectual hegemony. This in mind, Teshale calls for the casting away of the Semiticist paradigm in favor of a fresh start toward a more inclusive Africa-oriented Ethiopian historiography. "It is time that Ethiopian history is seen as part of African history. The "Hamites," condemned by Western Africanists to carry the burden of civilization into Africa,

⁷⁷Teshale, The Making of Modern Ethiopia pp. XX-XXI.

are long dead. . . It is time that Ethiopianist scholarship, as a hangover from Orientalism, is given a decent burial."⁷⁸

Ayele Bekerie's study--Ethiopic, An African Writing System--is a direct response to Teshale's challenge even if the work at times verges on the polemicist and the romanticist. Expounding on J. A. Drewes's original argument that Axum constituted an autochthonous African civilization, Ayele refutes the conventional wisdom that explains the advent of the Ge'ez script as a borrowed and modified innovation. Bekerie establishes common characteristics between Ethiopic and other African writing systems: mainly Egyptian and Meroetic. According to Bekerie, the Ethiopian classical writing system known as Ethiopic or Ge'ez is one of Africa's major contributions to world cultures. Ethiopic not only represents Africa's creative literary genius, but encapsulated in it are African systems of knowledge and philosophy.⁷⁹

Ayele goes further than Teshale in his criticism of the Semiticists. He rejects the Semitic thesis on the ground that the South Arabians lacked the type of logistics and technology permissive of a large scale colonial venture. It

⁷⁸Teshale, "Ethiopia: The Anomaly and Paradox of Africa" p. 428.

⁷⁹Ayele Bekerie, Ethiopic, an African Writing System: Its history and Principles (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1997), pp. 5-11.

had been claimed that the Asian influx took place across the isthmus of the Bab-el Mandeb, the gate of tears, the narrowest point between the two continents south of the Suez. The trek from the isthmus to the Northern Ethiopian plateau consists of hundreds of miles over one of the world's most inhospitable terrains. This in mind, Ayele cannot but raise some fundamental questions. What did Axum have that similar highland areas in Ethiopia or even in Arabia itself did not have? Why did the Sabceans, notorious for their sedentary agricultural lifestyle, decide to venture into a life-or-death struggle through a terrain so inhospitable that only a small number of them could have survived the ordeal? To such so simple yet naturally perplexing questions, the Semiticists have given no sufficient answer, Ayele concludes.⁸⁰

The Racialization of Ethiopian Historiography

Afrocentrism Versus Eurocentrism

The Eurocentered Semiticist school argues that Axumite civilization owed its inspiration to immigrant influence from across the Red Sea, who brought with them a high culture, a written language, the skill of architecture and the plough. The Afrocentric version, on the other hand, treats Ethiopia both as the cradle of humanity and as Africa's past

⁸⁰Ibid p. 34.

civilization par excellence. The Eurocentric perspective emphasizes Ethiopians' racial affinity with the Middle East, and portrays their country as a Semitic outpost, in but not of Africa. The Afrocentric literature, by contrast, regards Ethiopians as one of Africa's ancient stocks of people and places their past achievements at the center of African history. While Western scholars often stereotype Ethiopians as xenophobes who look down upon whites and blacks alike, Afrocentric writers identify with Ethiopia as an exemplar of race pride and liberty.

The Black Apartheid Image

A brief sampling of some of the contemporary white and black writings on Ethiopia might be instructive of these contrasting bipolar perceptions of a country and people. In an essay most Ethiopians would find far-fetched and outlandish, Colin Legum argued that the Amhara of Ethiopia and the Afrikaaners of South Africa entertained similar master race theories. Prior to the 1990s both groups ran minority governments that were discriminatory and oppressive to the majority. Since the sweeping winds of change in both nations in the early nineties, the Afrikaaners have been in a better position to cope with new realities than their Amhara counterparts. While the once influential Amhara had little

say in the Tigrean-dominated post-Marxist Ethiopian government, South African whites by contrast continued to hold on to their economic predominance even after the dismantling of apartheid.⁸¹

The Amhara-Afrikaaner analogy poses a logical fallacy as it compares the incomparable. Even if one accepts the false premise that the Amhara are more ethnic all self-conscious than other groups, the analogy still trivializes the entire history of the anti-colonial struggle by placing apartheid and ethnocentrism on the same ideological axis. But then Legum is not an exception in this. Sorenson, whose interest in liberation struggles led him to Eritrea where he spent some time with EPLF fighters and doctrinaires, invokes the image of the Amhara as black colonialists when he writes:

Racist thought takes on a peculiar elaboration in relation to Ethiopia, which often has been compared with medieval Europe rather than with other African states. Various texts categorize Ethiopians in the intermediate position between whites and blacks. Of course, racism and racial classifications are not uniquely Western preoccupations. In Ethiopia, the Amhara ruling elite some time have classified themselves as white but always as superior to the darker-skinned people of the south. Just as Europeans felt themselves preordained to 'bring civilization to savages', so did the Amhara feel themselves possessed with a 'civilizing mission' as they expanded their empire into areas occupied by other groups such as the Oromo.⁸²

⁸¹Colin Legum, "Ethiopia, the Amhara Factor," Ethiopian Commentator 2 (December 1993), pp. 56-57.

⁸²John Sorenson, Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for

The polemical nature of Sorenson's, and by extension of Legum's, statement does not concern us here. It suffices to say that, not only are the Oromo physically inseparable from the Amhara, but they have been an integral part of the "Abyssinian" society since the 16th century. For a good portion of the 18th century, in fact, the Oromo dominated the royal court in Gondar, Oromifa having temporarily supplanted Amharic as the palace language. This is, however, of no significance to Sorenson as it contradicts the myth of Oromo victimhood, the ideological basis of the OLF secessionist discourse.

The notion of "black apartheid" is most popular among two groups in the West. First, it is particularly common among colonial apologists such as Legum who try to minimize the moral turpitude of European colonialism by directing attention to supposed intra-racial colonial practices within Africa, namely the Amhara over the Oromo, or of the Tutsi over the Hutu, or of the Nguni-speaking Bantus over the Khoisans. Second, there are white ethnographers, such as Sorenson, who after studying and living with a particular ethnic group start to see the neighboring peoples through the lenses of their adoptive society. They not only pick up subconsciously their host society's biases and stereotypes

History and Identity in the Horn of Africa (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. 12.

against adjacent groups, but as ethnic primordialists they become staunch advocates and defenders of ethno nationalism. Their incendiary literature, however lacking in scholarly integrity, questions the legitimacy of the polyglot state in Africa and in so doing makes Balkanization an ever more eminent possibility.

Abyssinian racism, a variant of the black colonial image, needs some attention here as it is a focal point in many of the anti-Ethiopian Eurocentric literature. The myth of Abyssinian racism has its roots in the colonial era when all of Africa with the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia was under direct European occupation. As an independent black nation, Ethiopia was one place in Africa where the colonial color bar was absent. The absence of "whites only" hotels and other social amenities⁸³ was interpreted as a direct affront to European social sensibilities, thus the myth of Ethiopian racial chauvinism.⁸⁴

With the rise of several secessionist groups in the sixties and seventies, the myth of "Abyssinian snobbery

⁸³In the early 1930s there was an attempt by a Corsican proprietor to introduce a "whites only" night club in Addis Ababa. However, it was not long before the club became a source of outrage by the local elite and was eventually closed under government order. Carleton Coon, Measuring Ethiopia and Flight into Arabia (Boston: Little Brown, 1935), pp. 134-36.

⁸⁴Teshale, "Ethiopia: The Anomaly and Paradox of Africa" p. 422.

gained popular currency among ethnic propagandists for whom the Amhara represented a distinct colonial class. The redefinition of Abyssinian or Ethiopian racism as Amhara racism not only provided a common rallying point to the ethnic primordialists, but it also supplied an ideal rhetoric with which they prodded the visceral reaction of the ethnic masses. In Europe and North America, likewise, the myth of the Amhara racism served a special purpose as it morally legitimized the Oromo and Eritrean secessionist struggles.

The "Icon of Africa" Image

These socially and politically constructed myths of "Abyssinian racism" and Abyssinian colonialism have found their ardent critics in the Africa-oriented scholarship which argues that Ethiopia, because of its historic resistance against European rule, has received hostile attention in Western historiography. Thus, contrary to Legum's and Sorenson's descriptions of Ethiopian anti-black antipathy, black visitors to Northeast Africa portray Ethiopians positively as warm and friendly. In Rasta's pilgrimage, the Jamaican Neville Garrick writes, "The hospitality and respect the people of Ethiopia showed me will be for ever etched in my mind. . . Welcome to my Ethiopia: a world of welcoming people, smiling children, and a wealth of legendary

history.⁸⁵ Garrick's observation differs little from J. A. Rogers' similar firsthand impression of Ethiopians from sixty years earlier. Rogers, a Jamaican-born self-taught historian, agreed that the Ethiopians indeed rejected the term "Negro" because of its connotation of slavery and racial inferiority. First and foremost, the Ethiopians thought of themselves not as a "race" but as a "nation"; but next to being Ethiopians, they identified themselves as Africans, thereby recognizing their kinship with Caribbean and American blacks.⁸⁶

If Garrick's and Rogers' impressions appear suspect because of their association with black nationalism, one may then juxtapose Sorenson's and Legum's "black apartheid" image of Ethiopia against Henry Gates's description of the same country as "a Godly place" where diverse cultures and religions coexisted side by side for centuries.⁸⁷ According to the Harvard professor, ". . .for many black people--especially black Americans and the Rastafarians of Jamaica--Ethiopia has always represented something special, an almost mythically pristine site of blackness untrammelled

⁸⁵Neville Garrick, A Rasta's Pilgrimage: Ethiopian Faces and Places (San Fransisco: Pomegranate, 1999), p. 9.

⁸⁶J. A. Rogers, The Real Facts about Ethiopia (Atlanta: Atlanta University Woodrof Library Special Collections, 1982), pp. 4-6 and 30.

⁸⁷Henry Louis Gates, Wonders of the African World (New York: Knopf, 1999), p. 68.

by white racism or colonialism."⁸⁸

Gates looks back to his boyhood years in West Virginia in the 1950s when the word Ethiopia meant much more than a name. "It is difficult to imagine today how thrilling Biblical references to Ethiopia were to black Americans desperate for a history to be proud of when I was growing up in the 1950s. I relished the Bible's forty-one references to Ethiopia; I studied them, memorized them, and puzzled over their meanings."⁸⁹

Four decades later, while filming in Ethiopia for PBS's documentary series on Africa, Gates could still feel a sense of intimate connection with the country of his boyhood fantasy:

The Nubians, Amharic Ethiopians, and the Swahili all tended to address me in their own languages, mistaking me for one of their own kinsmen. . . . There are few emotions more sublime and exhilarating for an African American than to be mistaken for an indigenous African, as a person whose home is "the Continent," as we fondly call it. . . . And despite the fact, as I say, that I have had this experience among the Nubians in the Sudan, among the Swahili peoples living along the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts and on the island of Zanzibar, nowhere in the twelve African countries that I visited was I more consistently mistaken for an African than in the ancient country of Ethiopia, the second most populous in Africa.⁹⁰

Compared to the European-centered perspective, the

⁸⁸Ibid p. 67.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

Afrocentric narrative of the Ethiopian past still enjoys limited popularity as neither Gates nor other black writers before him have made much inroad into mainstream Ethiopian historiography. One explanation is that such African-oriented historical interpretations generally fall within the realm of African-American historiography with which few Ethiopianists are familiar. An obvious consequence of the marginalization of the Afrocentric school is that Ethiopian studies has become lopsided and less innovative. Ethiopian historiography, in its deconstructed form, has in fact become an agent of self-flagellation and national suicide as represented in the OLF and EPLF secessionist discourse. Even in its mainstream form, Ethiopian historiography is still nationalistic and inward-oriented. For example, whereas much has been written--most of it hypothetical--on ancient Axum's links with the Middle East, little is known about Axum's interactions with its African neighbors: Nubia and Egypt. Similarly, while several studies have focused on Ethiopia's diplomatic relations with the Western nations, few Ethiopianists have tried to understand Ethiopia's place in Africa or the black world at large.

What is in the Name?

If one accepts the Hellenized version of the meaning of

the word Ethiopia, it is not exactly clear when the Northeast Africans began to call themselves a "sunburned" people. According to Levine, it is more probable that the word "Ethiopia" gained widespread currency following the first translation of the Bible into Ge'ez around the fifth century.⁹¹ Ethiopians on the other hand trace the root of their country's name to an even remoter ancestry. According to a national legend, the word Ethiopia comes from "Ethiops," the name given to one of the sons of Kush, Kush being the son of Ham and the grandson of Noah.⁹² The etymology of the word Ethiopia might be contested back and forth, but what is definite in the above national saga is that Ethiopians chose to define themselves as an indigenous African people as the names Kush and Ham imply.

Such insightful oral vignettes have received little attention, unfortunately. In mainstream discourse, classical Ethiopia is divided into two Ethiopias: Axumite Ethiopia and Nubian Ethiopia.⁹³ The dichotomy, however arbitrary it may appear at first glance, serves a central purpose in entrenching the Semiticist perspective. Having drawn this apparent distinction between two classical empires,

⁹¹Levine, Greater Ethiopia p. 2.

⁹²E. A. Wallis Budge, A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia (Oosterhout, Netherlands: Anthropological Publications, 1966), p. 129.

⁹³For example, see Levine's Greater Ethiopia pp. 5-7.

Semiticists can proceed to the next step, namely, the treatment of Axum as a superior and immigrant-inspired civilization, in contrast to the less sophisticated and African-oriented Nubian Ethiopia.

The above dichotomy is presented as fact despite the absence of any record of territorial delineation between the supposed Sudanic and Axumite Ethiopias. If anything, both oral and written documents imply an overlapping history not just between the two regions but also with Pharaonic Egypt. According to Sergew Hable-Selassie, Axum, Nubia and Egypt shared similar techniques of boat making, used the same terminologies for words such as dwarf and incense, and their women wore beads and decorative eye-paint which they called Kohl.⁹⁴ Sergew also mentions a burial site in northern Ethiopia which, according to a local folklore, was the final resting ground of a Pharaoh.⁹⁵ On top of all this, a Ge'ez manuscript has been discovered from the Axumite period in which the Noba and Soba are said to have once ruled in northern Ethiopia.⁹⁶ Sergew less convincingly describes the Noba-Soba rulers as Semitic immigrants, but a more literal interpretation of the two words implies otherwise. Noba refers to the Sudanic state of Nubia, while Soba or Sobat is

⁹⁴Sergew, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopia p. 26.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid p. 34.

the name of the southeastern province in Sudan through which flows the river Sobat, one of the major tributaries of the Nile. What this all means is that Axum, and by extension present-day Ethiopia, far from constituting a distinct Semitic civilization, is indeed a microcosm of a much larger indigenous empire whose realm in classical times encompassed most of the Nile basin south of Egypt.

In its generic and loosely used context, the word Ethiopia refers to black Africa. Black awareness of Ethiopia and its signification came from reading classical writings, particularly the Scriptures, and the word "Ethiopia" as a synonym for Africa was used in black literary and religious circles as early as the late 18th century. Because Ethiopia is mentioned repeatedly in the Bible, blacks could not only claim a special attachment to the Holy Book but could also relate their experience in the New World to what the Israelites had experienced in Egypt and Babylon. Out of this grew the concept of Ethiopianism, the ideological precursor to modern black nationalism, which helped forge a sense of historicity and collective consciousness among peoples of color.⁹⁷ In the West Indies, the first independent black church was known as the Ethiopian Baptist Church.⁹⁸ In the

⁹⁷William R. Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 12-23.

⁹⁸See Brown's "George Liele: Black Baptist and

United States, one of the earliest militant anti-slavery documents was known as the Ethiopian Manifesto.⁹⁹ Frederick Douglass, the most celebrated African-American national figure in antebellum America, likewise ended his autobiography with a special tribute to Ps.6:31, ". . . notwithstanding the blood-written history of Africa, and her children, from whom we have descended, . . . 'Ethiopia shall yet reach forth her hand unto God.'"¹⁰⁰

Early Afrocentric Writings on Ethiopia

W. E. B. Du Bois, 1868-1963, was the first major black intellectual to interest himself in Ethiopian history. By 1903 the 35-year-old Du Bois, Harvard's first black Ph.D. graduate, had already gained recognition as a leading thinker and a prolific writer with the publication of his most influential work: The Souls of Black Folk. Twelve years later, Du Bois published a monograph on African history, The Negro, in which he took to task the Hegelian world view that Africa had no history worth examining. A subtle theme in the

Pan-Africanist."

⁹⁹Robert Alexander Young, "The Ethiopian Manifesto," in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, Herbert Aptheker, ed. (New York: Citadel Press, 1969), pp. 90-93.

¹⁰⁰Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 405.

Negro is the concept of Afrocentrism, although usage of that term did not start until decades later. Du Bois' contribution to the African-centered discourse lay in his argument that Africans, in their own right, possessed a past no less impressive than the histories of other races.¹⁰¹

In Negro, The Nile valley is portrayed as one of the earliest centers of civilization, and Ethiopian history is treated as a constituent part of that great epoch along with Egypt and Nubia. Du Bois traces the Ethiopian connection with Egypt to the pre-Pharaonic period. "Pre-dynastic Egypt was settled by Negroes from Ethiopia," he contends. "They were of varied type: the broad nose, wooly-haired type, to which the word 'Negro' is sometimes confined; the black curly-haired, sharper feature type, which must be considered an equally Negroid variation."¹⁰²

In his 1938 Black Folk Then and Now, Du Bois is adamant in his criticism of conventional historiography. "By general consent, modern historians have cut the history of the Nile Valley entirely away from the history of Africa, and most of them deny any connection between the two," he observes. "Egypt was by blood and by cultural development a part of the history of Africa, and Negro Africa must be explained

¹⁰¹W. E. B. Du Bois, The Negro (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

¹⁰²Ibid p. 18.

certainly in part by the history and development of Egypt." But Egypt was only a tip of the iceberg. "In Ethiopia and in what is known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, we have preeminently a land of the black race from pre-historic times; and yet today by a narrow and indefensible definition, the connection even of Ethiopia with Negro history is denied."¹⁰³

Du Bois' works situated Northeast African history within the scope of black historiography for the first time, and in so doing left a revolutionary mark both on contemporary and latter-day scholarship. His thesis would influence a coterie of black writers in the twenties and thirties who celebrated and defended Ethiopia's image as Africa's oldest independent polity.¹⁰⁴

Carter G. Woodson, the founder of the Journal of Negro History, followed in Du Bois's footsteps. In 1936 Woodson produced African Background, in which he reaffirmed the Du

¹⁰³W. E. B. Du Bois, Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race (New York: Octagon, 1969), p. 38.

¹⁰⁴Inspired by Du Bois' Negro, in 1926 Drusilla Dunjee Houston published Wonderful Ethiopians, in which she proffered an African-centered explanation for all major civilizations of antiquity. The book holds an exaggerated view of Ethiopia's place in ancient history even by mainstream Afrocentric standards. Its significance lies in the fact that it was the first of its kind ever written by a self-taught female historian. Drusilla Dunjee Houston, Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire (Baltimore: Black Classics Press, 1985).

Boisian Afrocentric thesis.¹⁰⁵ Africans had independently developed the art of metallurgy and pottery, invented writing systems, domesticated animals and practiced sedentary cultivation, Woodson commented. European writers had insisted such innovations were borrowed. However, "they have no more proof that what the Africans at that time knew was borrowed from foreigners than that the latter have borrowed such ideas from the blacks of the interior."¹⁰⁶

Du Bois had acknowledged the suffusion of Asian blood and culture into Africa through commercial intercourse. Such racial mixing, in his view, was not peculiar to the African shores alone, for "Negro blood" was also visibly evident in Arabia.¹⁰⁷ Woodson similarly described the entire Red Sea region as a cultural and racial "melting pot," an image which did not negate the fact that indigenous civilizations had evolved on both sides of the sea. "Infiltration rather than migration" dictated the means by which foreign elements trickled back and forth between the continents, and such exchanges, according to the Columbian graduate, were too insignificant to have altered the homegrown characteristics

¹⁰⁵Carter G. Woodson, The African Background Outlined (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968).

¹⁰⁶Ibid p. 21.

¹⁰⁷Du Bois, Negro pp. 23-24.

of the Axumite civilization.¹⁰⁸

The Jamaican J. A. Rogers' had visited Ethiopia as a newspaper correspondent shortly before the outbreak of the 1935-36 Italo-Ethiopian war. His trip furnished him with the material for a best selling pamphlet, The Real Facts about Ethiopia, which appeared in the same year as Woodson's African Background. The region south of Egypt was known to ancient travelers as Kush, Rogers historical sketch read. Kush had two centers, one at Nubia and the other at Axum. In the course of time, the two provinces of Kush drifted apart into two distinct kingdoms. Whereas Meroe, the capital of Nubia, was later destroyed by Muslim invaders from Egypt, Axum preserved its independence through a southward retreat away from the coast where Islam had taken a strong foothold.¹⁰⁹

Willis Huggins and John J. Jackson held a more critical appraisal of the Ethiopian past in contrast to the aforementioned writers. In their 1937 collaborative work, Introduction to African Civilizations, the two saw an important distinction between ancient and modern Ethiopian racial identities.¹¹⁰ From the seventh-century B.C. Piankhi

¹⁰⁸Woodson, African Background p. 24.

¹⁰⁹Rogers, Real Facts about Ethiopia pp. 8-10.

¹¹⁰Willis N. Huggins and John G. Jackson, An Introduction to African Civilizations, with Main Currents in Ethiopian History (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

to the 19th-century Menelik II, Ethiopians regarded themselves as part of black Africa. But after the death of Menelik in 1913, the Ethiopian elites accepted the pseudo-scientific classification of their countrymen as Caucasoid and, in so doing, alienated themselves from the African world at large. Far from remaining alert and battle-ready after their Adwan hey-day, the Ethiopians relaxed their guard and were easily outmatched and defeated by Italy the second time around.¹¹¹ the Ethiopians were moreover dumbfounded to discover that none of their European flatterers came to their rescue once the fascist onslaught began. In an ironic twist of fate, Huggins and Jackson argued, the Italo-Ethiopian war thus symbolized Ethiopia's de facto readmission into the black race.¹¹²

These early Africa-oriented writings on Ethiopia no doubt lacked the rigor of professional history. After all, few of these writers knew Ethiopia in person or had firsthand access to archaeological or archival sources. However, their pro-African theories informed subsequent Ethiopian historiography in more ways than one. For example, Woodson's description of the Asian newcomers as infiltrators and not as colonizers has been remphasized by Stuart Munro-Hay, a leading student of the Axumite period. Munro-Hay does not

¹¹¹Ibid pp. 49-52.

¹¹²Ibid p. 85.

deny the presence of Sabeian settlements in northern Ethiopia, and in fact dates their arrival to the region to eight hundred B.C.¹¹³ However, he refutes the assumption of the newcomers as colonizers, catalysts of high civilization. Because both Northeast Africans and the South Arabians were more or less at a comparable level of development, the latter did not and could not superimpose themselves as colonialists. They came and settled in Axum not as organized groups but in smaller units, and even then were forced to live with the natives in "some sort of symbiosis" before being completely assimilated by them.¹¹⁴

Similarly, the Afrocentrists' presentation of Axum as successor to Meroe, the first capital of ancient Ethiopia, has sparked archaeological investigation into the material culture of both regions. According to Rodolfo Fatovich and Kathryn Bard, ancient Ethio-Sudanese ties are best attested by the funerary artifacts common to both cultures. These include the excavation of fragments of bronze and arrow-heads in Axumite and Meroetic tombs, marks of royal burial in either instance. At Beta Giyorgis, an ancient burial site near the present-day town of Axum, Rodolfo and Bard have located miniature stelae whose shapes correspond to similar

¹¹³Stuart Munro-Hay, Aksum: An African Civilization (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 61.

¹¹⁴Ibid p. 63.

prehistoric monoliths at Kassala. Based on such fragmented yet crucial pieces of evidence, Fatovich and Bard de-emphasize the Semiticist thesis of the Axumite origin in favor of a more continental explanation. Their conclusion states that "no evidence of long distance trade had been found in the proto-Aksumite assemblages at Beta Giyorgis, save for a sherd with a probable Nubian origin."¹¹⁵

The physical evidence for the Axumite-Nubian connection comes not only from archaeological findings but also from paleographic records. Attesting to the Ethio-Sudanese connection of earlier times is the 4th-century Axumite stela. The obelisk, which is still in its original existence, bears the irrefutable inscription in Ge-Ez, a tribute to King Ezana's military exploits against Nubia.¹¹⁶ In a recently discovered 6th-century epigraphic inscription Nubia is again mentioned, this time as one of the six Axumite provinces or tributaries.¹¹⁷ The inference one could draw from the above sources is as follow. First, when Nubia with its capital at Napata--and later Meroe--was the dominant power, Axum

¹¹⁵Rodolfo Fatovich and Kathryn A. Bard, "The I.U.O./B.U. Excavations at Beta Giyorgis (Aksum) in Tigray (Northern Ethiopia)" Journal of Ethiopian Studies 30, 1 (1997), pp. 15-20.

¹¹⁶Richard Pankhurst, An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia from Earlier Times to 1800 (London: Lalibela House, 1961), pp. 29-30.

¹¹⁷Sergew, Ancient and Medieval History of Ethiopia p. 124.

constituted one of its southeastern provinces. Second, by the 4th-century A.D. Axum had felt powerful and independent enough to start flexing its military muscles and the expedition against the old capital underscored that point. Third, by the 6th century Axum had become a genuine regional power, its influence extending from Nubia in the northwest to Arabia in the east.¹¹⁸

One of the incontrovertible evidence of the complex nature of the Northeast African civilization, like that of Egypt, has been the erection of monumental statues. The ability to master such a highly labor-intensive, time-consuming national project demonstrates the presence of a skilled artisan class and of a centralized state bureaucracy to muster it. The historical significance of the stelae themselves is of course contested. For the Semiticists the obelisks in Axum imply the genius of the South Arabian immigrants, supposedly notorious for their unique skills of masonry and architecture. An Africanist interpretation on the other hand shows that the erection of such monolithic structures, far from being peculiar to Axum, was commonly associated with royal burial customs in Nubia and Egypt.

Bruce reported in his memoir of having seen some Stelae in Axum with visible Egyptian influence. According to the Scottish traveler, atop some of the obelisks lay faint

¹¹⁸Ibid.

replications of the sphinx, while on some others was engraved the dog-star, a representation of the Egyptian god Sirius.¹¹⁹ Bruce also cites a paleographic "inscription" on one of the stelae,¹²⁰ which, according to Hable-Selassie, was a short prayer in praise of the Egyptian god Horus.¹²¹ Even though Bruce knew the association of Axum with Arabia from his reading of Job Ludolf's work, the fact that the Ethiopian stone monuments bore certain Egyptian and Nubian characteristics convinced him to think otherwise. Regarding the pre-history of Axum, he thus wrote: ". . .for my part, I believe it to have been the metropolis of the trading people, or the Troglidyte Ethiopians, properly called Cushites."¹²²

The Linguistic Basis of Ethiopian Afrocentrism

As mentioned earlier, The linguistic basis of the Semiticist interpretation of Ethiopian history goes back several centuries. Interestingly enough, some of the compelling argument against the Semitic thesis is also based on linguistic analysis. In 1956 A. J. Drewes published a

¹¹⁹James Bruce, Travels and Adventures in Abyssinia (Edinburgh: A. C. Black, 1860), pp. 162-63.

¹²⁰Ibid p. 164.

¹²¹Sergew, Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History p. 26.

¹²²Bruce, Travels and Adventures in Abyssinia p. 162.

short article in the Ethiopia Observer in which he challenged the prevalent assumption of the Sabeian tongue as the parent language to Ge'ez and Ge'ez script.¹²³ Initial research had dated the oldest Sabeian inscriptions in Ethiopia to about 5th-century B.C., several centuries older than the oldest Ge'ez script. This fact prompted the general acceptance of the Sabeian tongue as the parent language to Ge'ez. More Ge'ez texts were discovered in the 1950s that were almost as old as the earliest Sabeian scripts, but that did not alter the earlier assumption of Sabeian as the parent language. Drewes' article, which later grew into a book,¹²⁴ acknowledged the presence of Arabian immigrants in Ethiopia as was evident by the characteristically Sabeian inscriptions they left behind. However, since the earliest Ge'ez inscriptions appeared in the same time frame as did the Sabeian inscription, it concluded that Sabeian writing system did not impact the development of Ge'ez script. "It remains true that the two languages resemble one another, but we can no longer prove the south-Arabian origin of Geez by referring to the presence of Sabaeian inscriptions on Ethiopian territory. . . . The origin of Geez lies hidden in a period for which we have no

¹²³A. J. Drewes, "The Origins of the Semitic Languages of Ethiopia," Ethiopia Observer 2, 3 (1956) pp. 113-15.

¹²⁴Abraham Johannes Drewes, Inscriptions de l'Ethiopie Antique (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962).

written documents, before the 5th-century B.C."¹²⁵

Drewes's overall thesis is shared by Ephraim Isaac, the Ethiopian-born classicist, who claims Semiticist historiography suffers serious methodological flaws because of its entrenchment in a "Hegelian Euro-centric philosophical perspective of history." Ephraim particularly singles out E. Glaser and Conti-Rossini for a flawed and racially self-serving scholarship. "Both of these scholars attached special significance to the name **hbst** which appeared in a number of Sabaeen texts," Ephraim observes. "The obvious similarity between **hbst** and the Arabic al-habasa (Abyssinia) was believed to be explicit proof of the Sabaeen origins of Ethiopian civilization. . . Clearly, the identification of the **hbst** as the South Arabian precursors of the Ethiopian civilization is at best a guess."¹²⁶

Ephraim disputes the notion of South Arabian influx to Ethiopia on four grounds. First, the author of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea made no inference to immigrants from Arabia during his visit to Adulis in the 2nd century. Second, the word **hbst**, which is "found in Sabaeen inscriptions in South Arabia, does not appear in the Ethiopian ones at least

¹²⁵Drewes, "Semitic Languages of Ethiopia" p. 115.

¹²⁶Ephraim Isaac and Cain Felder, "Reflections on the Origin of the Ethiopian Civilization," Proceedings of the Eighth International Ethiopian Studies Conference (Addis Ababa, 1984), p. 71 and p. 73.

until Esana's time" or about the mid 4th century A.D. Third, in the various inscriptions so far discovered in Ethiopia and Arabia, no reference is made to a large population movement in either direction.¹²⁷ Lastly, in recorded history, South Arabia has never dominated the African side of the sea, while the reverse is true for Axum, "in particular, from about 335 to 370 and from about 525 to 575 of this era." At a hypothetical level, therefore, Axumite cultural infiltration to South Arabia is as much plausible as South Arabian cultural infiltration to Axum. What this means is that without an objective and a scientifically backed-up reappraisal of the debate, Axumite historiography will remain speculative and subject to various interpretations.¹²⁸

Whereas Drewes and Ephraim question the Asiatic origin of Ethiopian civilization, Grover Hudson goes a step further and argues that in Ethiopia and not in the Fertile Crescent lay the cradle of the Afro-Asiatic language cluster. A language achieves its most dialectal variation in its base area where it had survived longest. According to Hudson, the largest concentration of the Afro-Asiatic dialects is found in the Gurage land of central Ethiopia, where a half dozen Semitic and Kushitic dialects are spoken in an area of eight-thousand square miles. In addition to the Gurage dialects,

¹²⁷Ibid pp. 72-73.

¹²⁸Ibid p. 80.

Ethiopia is a home to several more Semitic languages: Amharic, Tigregna, Tegre, Harare, Ge'ez, and Gafat and Argoba, the last two long since extinct. Assuming the presence of more dialectal variations in the base area, Hudson hypothesizes present-day central Ethiopia to be the original point of dispersal for the Afro-Asiatic language group.¹²⁹

What is obvious from the discussion above is that the Semitic paradigm, although still the dominant school of thought among most Ethiopianists, is finally beginning to crack. The contributions by Hudson, Drewes, Munro-Hay, Fatovich and Ephraim may not have received the attention they deserve, but their overlapping arguments show that new and less conventional ideas have slowly begun to make a positive inroad into Ethiopian studies. These scholars have taken the Du Boisian Afrocentric thesis to newer heights giving it scholarly rigor and respectability. While constituting a continuum of the Afrocentric tradition, their ideas signal a positive trend in the overall progress of Ethiopian studies. On the debit side, the aforementioned scholars, most of them white, have limited their Afrocentric speculation to the Axumite or pre-Axumite periods. Ethiopia's connection with modern Africa therefore remains a topic hardly scratched, and

¹²⁹Grover Hudson, "Language Classification and the Semitic Pre-History of Ethiopia," Folia Orientalia 18, (1977).

the few that tried it, as will be shown below, are mostly African-American scholars with a primary interest in African-American history.

Post-War Black Scholarship on Ethiopia

A discussion of post-war black intellectual interest in Ethiopia should start with a brief mention of William Leo Hansberry, for his association with Ethiopia extended both into the pre-war and the post-war periods. No black scholar could claim a lifetime commitment to Ethiopia as did Hansberry, the first Harvard-trained African-American anthropologist. As a professor at Howard University, in the 1930s Hansberry launched a more systematic approach to the study of Ethiopian antiquities under the auspices of the Ethiopian Research Council. After the war, he not only remained closely connected with Ethiopian officials in Washington but also regularly contributed newspaper articles on Ethiopia.

In 1965 the Howard professor published an original research paper in which he argued that Ethiopian travelers had reached Europe long before the first group of European explorers set foot in Ethiopia. Hansberry cited papal records that mention the visits to Florence and Rome by Ethiopian monks in more than one occasion during the mid-fifteenth

century. In each case, the black delegates were received warmly by their hosts, uncharacteristic of later-day European attitude toward Africans.¹³⁰ In 1966 Hansberry received Haile Selassie's Africa Trust Prize, (a sum of 70,000 Ethiopian dollars), for his pioneering role in Ethiopian studies, and seven years later some of his writings were compiled and published posthumously as Pillars in Ethiopian History by Joseph Harris.¹³¹

The only diasporic African whose commitment to Ethiopia parallels that of Hansberry's is David Talbot, a naturalized American citizen of Guyanese origin. After the Italo-Ethiopian war, Talbot permanently settled in Ethiopia serving as a newspaper editor and radio broadcaster. Although of little scholarly significance, to his credit are three books on Ethiopia, each of which dealt with such wide ranging topics as history, government, education, religion and commerce.¹³²

A topic in which post-war African-American scholarship

¹³⁰William Leo Hansberry, "Ethiopian Ambassadors to Latin Courts, and Latin Emissaries to Prester John," Ethiopia Observer 9 (1965), pp. 90-99.

¹³¹William Leo Hansberry, Pillars in Ethiopian History ed. Joseph E. Harris. (Washington: Howard University Press, 1974).

¹³²David Talbot, Ethiopia: Liberation Silver Jubilee (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information, 1966); Contemporary Ethiopia New York: Philosophical Library, 1952); Haile Selassie I: Silver Jubilee (Hague: W.P. Van Stockum, 1955).

deserve particular mention is in the study of the Italo-Ethiopian war and the racial responses it invoked worldwide. In the United States, the two definitive works on this subject are William Scott's Sons of Sheba's Race,¹³³ and Joseph Harris's African-American Reaction to War in Ethiopia.¹³⁴ Prewar intra-racial interaction and wartime anti-fascist mobilization are the focus of both studies, with additional attention by Harris to the short-lived African-American involvement in post-war Ethiopian reconstruction. The African equivalent to Scott's and Harris's contributions is Asante's West African Protest in which the Italo-Ethiopian war is presented as the major spark of modern anti-colonial consciousness in Africa.¹³⁵

Compared to West Africa or black America, the West Indian response to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia has produced no major comprehensive research. Only three articles, one of them unpublished, have thus far considered the Caribbean implication of the war. Robert Weisbord's seven-page article, "British West Indian Reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War,"

¹³³William Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

¹³⁴Joseph Harris, African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1994).

¹³⁵S. K. B. Asante, Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941 (London: Longman, 1977).

highlights the islands' pro-Ethiopian sentiments as expressed in contemporary local newspapers.¹³⁶ Rita Pemberton's "The Ties that Bind" builds on Weisbord's article, her main original contribution being the treatment of the Calypso as a popular medium of expression of the anti-fascist protest.¹³⁷ While Trinidad is at the center of Pemberton's inquiry, Ken Post's "The Bible as Ideology" is an analysis of the Jamaican response to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict which, according to the author, was a manifestation of the working class protest against European imperialist expansion.¹³⁸

Through the 1940s Ethiopia continued to arouse black interest abroad, although to a much lesser degree than the pre-war years. As William Shack and Joseph Harris have shown, a small number of New World blacks traveled to Ethiopia in the forties to help in post-war reconstruction efforts. While most of these expatriates returned to America by 1948, a number of them stayed in Ethiopia making indispensable

¹³⁶Robert Weisbord, "British West Indian Reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War: An Episode in Pan-Africanism," Caribbean Studies 10, 1 (April 1970), pp. 34-41.

¹³⁷Rita Pemberton, "The Ties that Bind Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean to Ethiopia, 1896-1996.," a paper presented at the Addis Ababa University Adwa Centenary Conference (Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1996).

¹³⁸Ken Post, "The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica, 1930-1938," in African Perspectives, C. Alan and R. W. Johnson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 185-207.

contributions in technical and educational areas.¹³⁹

By the 1950s the wartime pro-Ethiopian sympathy had run its course and Ethiopian issues spurred little excitement thenceforth. This gradual decline of black enchantment with Ethiopia can be explained on four levels. First, although Ethiopia aroused black sympathy and support during the fascist invasion, Rome's final triumph over the country negated most of the positive symbols with which Ethiopia had been identified since Adwa, namely Ethiopia's infallibility and its fighting prowess. Second, with most African states being decolonized in the 1950s and 1960s, diasporic blacks could now proudly identify with other African countries with which they had more binding cultural and historical affiliations. Third, because of the civil rights movement and the positive changes it created at home, African-Americans became more inward-focused from the 1960s on. Fourth, the 1974 overthrow of Haile Selassie by a Marxist junta, and the years of famine and civil war that ensued, finally marked the end of Ethiopian symbolism as far as black Americans were concerned.¹⁴⁰

Even though the above factors also adversely affected

¹³⁹William A. Shack, "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans: Some Historical Notes, 1920-1970," Phylon 35, 2 (1971), pp. 142-155. Harris, African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia see ch. 11.

¹⁴⁰Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 214-20.

Ethiopia's image among the majority of West Indians, Ethiopia still continues to hold a special appeal to tens of thousands of Caribbean loyalists. This is in part due to the Rastafarian religious preoccupation with Ethiopia, and in part due to the presence of several thousands of West Indian adherents to the Tewahedo Faith. The study of Rastafarianism, both as a religious sect and as a socio-cultural phenomenon, has produced a growing body of literature, two of whose classic works are Smith's The Rastafari Movement,¹⁴¹ and Barret's The Rastafarians.¹⁴² The literature on Dread has not, however, captured one important facet of the Ethio-Caribbean connection: the presence of a Rastafarian emigre community in southern Ethiopia. Other than an ethnographic master's thesis that focused on the internal dynamics of the Shashemene settlement,¹⁴³ no historical reconstruction has been attempted about the repatriation process itself.

Neville Garrick's Rasta's Pilgrimage is the only book on Ethiopia by a Rastafari practitioner, or a Jamaican for that matter, with a firsthand experience in Ethiopia.

¹⁴¹M. G. Smith, Roi Augier and Rex Nettleford, The Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica (Mona, Jamaica: University College of the West Indies Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1960).

¹⁴²Leonard E. Barret, The Rastafarians: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

¹⁴³Ababu Minda, "Rastafarians in the Promised Land: a Study of Identity Maintenance and Change," (MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1997).

Garrick, an artist and the former designer of Bob Marley's album covers, toured Ethiopia in the fall of 1996, and three years later came forth with his coffee-table picture book. Besides a passing two-page reference on Shashemane, the book is a photographic account of Ethiopian major towns and historic sites. Captured in the several dozen portraits is, however, the Rastafarian perception of Ethiopia: idyllic, beautiful, serene and harmonic. As the author himself admits, "Many historical books have been written and many photo books published about the Ethiopian empire, but never from the perspective of Rastaman returning to his roots."¹⁴⁴

Finally, the study of Ethio-Caribbean ties cannot be complete without an investigation into the Ethiopian religious influence on the West Indian society outside the Rastafarian sect. The history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Caribbean, an equally neglected topic, has only been treated by Trevor Millett and by Archbishop Yesehaq.¹⁴⁵ Using locally available sources, mostly oral, Trevor Millett's master's thesis provides a general historical outline of the African Church in Trinidad and Tobago, whereas

¹⁴⁴Neville Garrick, A Rasta's Pilgrimage: Ethiopian Faces and Places p. 8.

¹⁴⁵Trevor Millett, "A Brief History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church In Trinidad and Tobago," (MA thesis, University of the West Indies at St. Augustine, 1994); Archbishop Yesehaq, The Ethiopian Tewahedo Church: An Integrally African Church (New York: Vantage Books, 1989).

Fr. Yesehaq offers in three chapters a chronological account of the EOC's missionary activities in New York and Jamaica. Both works constitute an important start in the study of Ethio-Caribbean religious ties, but a more analytical and comprehensive treatment of the subject is yet to materialize.

Chapter II

The Italo-Ethiopian War and Black Nationalism

Few world events had ever aroused African-American and Caribbean interest in Africa as did the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. The African-American reaction to the Ethiopian dispute has been discussed in a number of works, of which the two most important are the studies by Scott and Harris.¹ Compared to North America, the Italo-Ethiopian crisis had longer-lasting effects on the West Indian political landscape. Yet, other than the articles by Post, Weisbord and Yelvington, the Caribbean anti-fascist manifestation has received no serious attention.²

This chapter differs from the works mentioned above

¹William R. Scott, The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). Joseph E. Harris, African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia, 1936-1941 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).

²Robert Weisbord, "British West Indian Reaction to the Italian-Ethiopian War," Caribbean Studies 10, 1 (April 1970); Kevin Yelvington, "The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad, 1935-1936," In The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Postemancipation Social and Cultural History, Bridget Brereton and Kevin A. Yelvington, eds. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), pp. 189-225; Ken Post, "The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica, 1930-1938," in African Perspectives, C. Alan and R. Johnson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Post's essay was reprinted in his Arise ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labor Rebellion and its Aftermath (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), pp. 159-205.

because of its comparative treatment of the Italo-Ethiopian war and its aftermath on Caribbean and American blacks. Unlike the aforementioned studies, the scope of this chapter goes beyond the immediate war years as it assesses the long-term consequence of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis on modern black nationalism. The first half of the chapter focuses on popular responses to the war: the New World black masses and their anti-fascist sentiments. The latter half examines how the war served to sharpen differences in race consciousness among the Caribbean and the Afro-American intelligentsia and how such differences in turn shaped the course of pan-Africanism.

Reactions to the war

The International Response

The Italo-Ethiopian war invoked various responses globally. Some of these responses were driven by national self-interest, some by racial and anti-colonial convictions, others by a strong leftist and anti-fascist ideological fervor, and others by the humanitarian impulse.

Although Italy's unprovoked aggression of Ethiopia aroused popular indignation worldwide, national self-interest dictated that European governments remain acquiescent toward

Mussolini. Since Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s, the fascist government in Rome had impressed the major European powers as a valuable ally against a remilitarized Germany. Even though both Italy and Germany maintained territorial ambitions over Austria, France and Britain excused Mussolini's arms buildup and nationalistic rhetoric as the lesser of the two evils. Consequently, the Anglo-French diplomatic involvement with Italy, during the latter's invasion of Ethiopia, was characterized more by a policy of placation than by the search for justice.³

Once the war between Ethiopia and Italy broke out, France and England did indeed recognize the League of Nations' policy of arms embargo on the belligerent parties. They did so, however, aware of the favorable impact such a stand had on Italy. As an industrial nation with years of war preparation, Italy had most of the resources for modern warfare, while Ethiopia had none.⁴ Moreover, the League's call for arms embargo did little to impede normal economic activities between Italy and the rest of the Western world on whom Mussolini depended for strategic war materials. The League of Nations' policy of neutrality, as defined by the League's influential members, therefore meant a death warrant

³Harold Marcus, Haile Selassie I: The Formative Years, 1892-1936 (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1995), pp. 128-30, 153-58 and 163-66.

⁴Ibid p. 157.

to Ethiopian independence. The United States, a non-signatory to the League of Nations, also chose to follow the example of its European counterparts despite the African-American call for a more proactive role.⁵

Not every white government extended its support to Italy in the name of national self-interest, at least during the initial stage of the crisis. Following Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s, the relationship between Germany and Italy had grown more tense as both vied for dominance over Austria. Germany therefore pursued a pro-Ethiopian posture as part of its overall anti-Italian stratagem. Immediately after the Walwal incident, Germany agreed to arm three Ethiopian infantry divisions with modern weaponry in the hope of subverting Italy's overseas expansion. According to this agreement, whose actual existence Germany eventually denied, Ethiopia was to receive an arms supply worth thirty-three million Reichmark, most of it to be paid for gradually through the export of Ethiopian agricultural products. A subsequent change of heart by the German government prevented the arrangement from being put into full effect, but not

⁵For a comprehensive treatment of the Western government's reaction to the African war see Stephen U. Chukumba, Ethiopia and the Big Powers: Anglo-Franco-American Diplomatic Maneuvers during the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute, 1934-1938 (Washington: University of American Press, 1977). For a study of the American response see Brice Harris's The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964).

before Ethiopia received a consignment of about ten thousand German rifles, millions of cartridges, medical shipments, machine-guns and cannons.⁶

Like Germany, the South African government reacted unfavorably to Rome's belated colonial designs in Northeast Africa. On the one hand, officials in Pretoria feared Italy's colonial conquest, if indeed successful, would exacerbate black-white racial tensions throughout the continent. On the other hand, if Italy lost the war, as it had forty years earlier at Adwa, the Ethiopian victory might trigger a series of spontaneous anti-colonial and anti-white revolts. Mindful of a strong anti-fascist sentiment at home, the South African government adopted a pro-Ethiopian rhetoric and even allowed zealot whites and blacks to organize themselves into pro-Ethiopian defense groups.⁷

The pro-Ethiopian policies of South Africa and Germany were exceptions. Both governments supported Ethiopia for reasons of political expediency and not out of moral conviction. Their support was temporary, moreover. With Mussolini's growing disinterest in Austria because of his

⁶Bairu Tafla, Ethiopia and Germany: Cultural, Political and Economic Relations, 1871-1936 (Weisbaden, Franzsteiner Verlag, 1981), pp. 140-42; Marcus, Haile Selassie pp. 154-55.

⁷Patricia G. Clark, "Stretching out their Hands: The South African Reaction to Italy's 1935 Invasion of Ethiopia," Proceedings of the Twelfth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (East Lansing: 1994), pp. 573-95.

preoccupation with Northeast Africa, Germany unilaterally terminated its commercial and military dealings with Ethiopia under the pretext of neutrality. But contrary to his rhetoric of non-partisanship, Hitler supported the Italian cause from November 1935 on and, a few months later, recognized Italy's suzerainty over Ethiopia.⁸

Likewise, Italy's brutal and speedy conquest of Ethiopia relieved South African officials of their morbid fears. The defeat of Ethiopia, the country seen by many blacks as the last bastion of independence, in fact reassured Hertzog's government of the soundness of its policy of racial segregation. Emboldened by the triumph of Mussolini's white supremacist policy in northeast Africa, in 1936 the Pretorian regime passed the "Representation of Natives Act" by which it ended the Cape Province's liberal policy of African franchise.⁹

If duplicity and self-interest characterized the West's official reaction to the conquest of Ethiopia, at the street level the war sparked a genuine out-pouring of public sympathy for the underdog nation. The extent of Italian war atrocities, especially Mussolini's resort to poison gas and indiscriminate bombardment of civilian centers, aroused a

⁸Bairu, Ethiopia and Germany pp. 140-42.

⁹Nigel Worden, The Making of a Modern South Africa (Cambridge, Mas.: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), p. 75.

universal humanitarian rage, race or class differences notwithstanding.¹⁰ Religious leaders, trade unionists, liberals and pacifists alike condemned the Italian invasion as unjust and barbaric. In Britain alone, more than a dozen organizations were set up on the eve of the war to assist in the Ethiopian defense campaign. The London-based "Abyssinia Society" filled its ranks with influential anti-war activists, outspoken Fabians and government officials. The "Circle for the Liberation of Ethiopia," another prominent anti-war group in England, was led and founded by the renowned suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst. Through her weekly newspaper, the New Times and Ethiopia News, Mrs. Pankhurst remained personally committed to the Ethiopian cause during and after the war. Her son, Richard Pankhurst, would become a renowned Ethiopianist in the post-liberation decades, and she herself would be buried in Addis Ababa where a street was named in her honor.¹¹

While European and North American middle class whites sympathized with the Ethiopian position for humanitarian reasons, subjugated peoples in Africa and Asia saw the war from the anti-colonial perspective. They regarded the Italian

¹⁰For example see Daniel Philip Waley's British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, 1935-1936 (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1975).

¹¹P. Olisanwuche Esedebe, Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776-1963 (Washington: Howard University Press, 1982), pp. 119-22.

conquest of Ethiopia as a setback to their own struggle for independence and self determination. The Indian National Congress, for instance, understood Italy's aggression as subverting its own nonviolent confrontation with Britain, but did raise medical supplies and money for shipment to Ethiopia.¹² The Egyptian Red Crescent Society reportedly dispatched a medical team of doctors and nurses to the Ethiopian war front to help treat the wounded. Ethiopia's victim status softened Muslim religious animosity to the country, with major Arab intellectuals condemning the attack on Ethiopia as an attack on a "sister oriental" state.¹³

Even though geographically and historically distant, the Chinese drew parallels between the Japanese attack on their country and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. In a message sent to the Negro Worker, a Moscow-sponsored black periodical, the Chinese communist party recognized fraternal ties between the masses of China and Ethiopia because of their common anti-colonial goals. The Chinese too had to fight against Italian military pilots sent by Mussolini to help speed up Japan's colonial conquest of the Far East, the message reminded. "This cements more firmly the bond between us and the Ethiopian people in the struggle against a common

¹²Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 147-48.

¹³Hagai Erlich, "Haile Selassie and Arabs," Northeast African Studies 1, 1 (1994), pp. 50-51 and 54-55.

enemy--the imperialist robbers. . . . Long live the independence of Ethiopian republic!"¹⁴

In an ironic twist of history, the Japanese also identified with Ethiopia at the outset of the African conflict. Because of their alienation from the Western powers, the Japanese, who then saw themselves as members of the colored world, initially shared in the pro-Ethiopian exultation. Having negotiated a commercial treaty with Ethiopia in 1931, the Japanese regarded the 1935 aggression as impinging on their sphere of influence. As a result they were among the first to join the anti-fascist bandwagon. In Tokyo and a few other major cities Ethiopian defense societies sprang up overnight on the eve of the war, urging their government to intervene militarily on Ethiopia's side. About 1200 swords, relics from the 1895 Sino-Japanese and the 1905 Russo-Japanese wars, were supposedly sent to Ethiopia along with some medical supplies by concerned groups in Japan.¹⁵ Like Berlin and Pretoria, however, Tokyo eventually closed ranks with like-minded European fascists when so doing fitted its national interest. It supported Italy's campaign of colonial conquest in exchange for the latter's recognition

¹⁴"Soviet China Hails Abyssinia," The Negro Worker 5, 11 (December 1935), p. 17.

¹⁵Bahru Zewde, The Ethiopian Intelligentsia and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Boston: Boston University African Studies Center, 1991), pp. 9-12.

of the Japanese puppet state of Manchuko (or Manchuria), hitherto a province of China.¹⁶

The Racial Response

In the West Indies, Africa and black America, racial sentiment galvanized the anti-fascist protest even more than the colonial, economic, or humanitarian factor. Since Ethiopia's spectacular victory over Italy at Adwa forty years earlier, blacks had looked to the Northeast African nation as a source of inspiration, a beacon of hope and freedom. To peoples of color the world over, Mussolini's unchallenged march into Ethiopia represented a reversal in their collective struggle for freedom and equality, perceived by many as the "final victory of whites over blacks." Consequently, unlike any other events before it, the Italo-Ethiopian war sparked nationalistic outbursts of racial solidarity among the black masses of Africa, the U.S. and the Caribbean.¹⁷

As William Scott and Joseph Harris have documented, the black American pro-Ethiopian agitation was primarily carried

¹⁶Tetsushi Furukawa, "Japanese-Ethiopian Relations: 1920s-1930s," Paper Presented at the African Studies Association Annual Conference (St. Louis: 1991).

¹⁷John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans (New York: Knopf, 1988), p. 385.

out by black newspapers like the Pittsburgh Courier, the Amsterdam News, the Chicago Defender, the Marxist Daily Worker, and NAACP's Crisis. However indignant they felt, black Americans voiced their protest against the war through non-violent means, mostly through church prayers, peaceful street rallies and demonstrations. In large cities like New York where blacks had a significant presence, the anti-war protest resulted in the formation of various ad hoc Ethiopian defense groups, among them the Medical Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia, the Provisional League for the Defence of Ethiopia and the Friends of Ethiopia. In 1936 these groups joined together to form an umbrella organization, the United Aid for Ethiopia, under whose auspices they lobbied trying to shift Washington's stand in the war from that of neutrality to one of pro-Ethiopian.¹⁸

Like the Afro-American media, West Indian newspapers played a leading role in drawing a sensational picture of the war and in mobilizing the local Ethiopian defense lobby. In the Jamaican Daily Gleaner, for example, contrasts were made between the images of a mad and monstrous Mussolini and that of a saintly Haile Selassie. Contrary to Mussolini's quixotic and bellicose dispositions, Haile Selassie was portrayed as

¹⁸Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 105-20; Harris, African-American Reactions to War in Ethiopia pp. 63-92.

"sad-eyed" and "sad-hearted," pious and patriotic.¹⁹ Another major Caribbean paper, the Port of Spain Gazette, stated that "no world cause today can be more appealing than the struggle of this defenseless nation whose appeal has touched the conscience of the inhabitants of this cosmopolitan country."²⁰

The newspapers record various fund raising events, including beneficial shows and concerts associated with the pro-Ethiopian campaign. In certain cases, the papers themselves opened "Ethiopian fund" accounts and urged their readers to contribute. For instance, in conjunction with the multi-ethnic "Friends of Ethiopia Committee," headed by Captain Cipriani,²¹ the Port-of-Spain Gazette launched the Ethiopia Assistance Fund, which raised over 1500 Trinidadian dollars in a period of two months.²² The Gazette's fund-raising success set a precedent for the other islands to follow. A sum of five thousand U.S. dollars was reportedly

¹⁹"In the Name of God," Daily Gleaner October 12, 1935.

²⁰"Ethiopia Assistance Fund," Port of Spain Gazette November 2, 1935.

²¹Captain A.A. Cipriani, mayor of Port-of-Spain and founder of the Trinidadian Labor Party, played a central role in the Ethiopian defense campaign. A Catholic of Corsican origin, he was one of the few white Trinidadians whose pro-Ethiopian sentiment was not compromised by a racial bias. See Yelvington, "The War in Ethiopia," pp. 205-13.

²²"Help Ethiopia Assistance Fund," Ibid December 15, 1935.

sent to Ethiopia from the West Indies alone by Christmas that year.²³

The much bigger black American community by contrast had raised less than a fifth of the above amount, according to a statement by Willis Huggins, a leading Harlemites activist. The Alabama-born Huggins was candid enough to admit even that small sum was acquired mainly due to the effort of the West Indian emigre community in New York. "The West Indian Negro is beginning to feel more and more that he must work alone."²⁴

A number of factors explain why the pro-Ethiopian crusade elicited a limited fund-raising success despite the extreme popularity of the cause. First, the great depression of the 1930s affected peoples of color disproportionately. The first to be fired and the last to be hired, urban blacks had historically suffered from widespread unemployment and poverty. Faced by the worst economic slump of the century, even fewer blacks were in a position to help the Ethiopian cause during the 1935-36 war.

Secondly, in the initial stage of the war, during which the pro-Ethiopian mobilization was at its peak, the fund raising effort lacked organizational accountability. For the most part, it was carried out by individual activists like

²³Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race p. 116.

²⁴Ibid.

Huggins who was later accused of using the war for personal gains. Attempts were finally made to coordinate North America's pro-Ethiopian activities under the leadership of Melaku Bayen, Haile Selassie's personal emissary to black America. But Melaku did not arrive in the United States until fall 1936, by which time most of the fund raising frenzy had already died down.²⁵

Thirdly, when juxtaposed against other pro-Ethiopian groups, black contribution did not necessarily rank low. In his memoir, Haile Selassie paid a special tribute to diasporic Africans for their "substantial support" to his government in exile. However loosely the word "support" is used in the text, the monarch's purposeful mention of the event indicates his receipt of financial assistance from Western blacks.²⁶ He also remembered accepting financial backing from white sympathizers, but hastened to add that the aid, in any case, was too little to have alleviated his economic predicament.²⁷ The Emperor had to auction his "personal effects" in order to make ends meet, and even then lived in "genteel poverty," as one of his confidants put

²⁵Ibid pp. 115-20.

²⁶Haile Selassie, My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, trans. Harold Marcus and others. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), p. 27.

²⁷Ibid pp. 36-38.

it.²⁸

Compared to the economic response, an even less successful aspect of the black reaction to the war was the effort to launch a military expedition to Ethiopia. In the United States alone thousands of blacks were said to have volunteered their services, but their efforts bore no fruit for two reasons. First, American law prevented its citizens from joining a foreign army to fight against a country with whom the U.S. government was at peace. Because Washington and Rome were still on cordial terms, the attempt to send a black American legion to Africa was discouraged by the State Department. The second reason, which rendered the first point irrelevant, was the simple fact of economics. The actual cost of transporting arms and troops to Ethiopia needed financial support far beyond the reach of the black community.²⁹

Notwithstanding such political and logistical hurdles, at least two black volunteers reached Addis Ababa in 1935. As the emperor's personal courier, John Robinson of Chicago took part in the war by flying risky errands between the Ethiopian capital and the northern front, for which the rank of captain was later bestowed on him. The other individual, also a pilot, was the controversial Trinidadian-born Hubert Julian,

²⁸John H. Spencer, Ethiopia at Bay (Algonac: Reference Publications, 1984), p. 82.

²⁹Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 60-66.

a flamboyant Harlemite who made his living by doing such devil-daring acts as parachuting from an airplane while playing the saxophone. Adding to Julian's popularity was the fact that he had survived unscathed two plane crashes a few years earlier--one while on a supposed trans-Atlantic flight to West Africa that took him no farther than the shores of New York, the other while rehearsing an air-show for Haile Selassie's coronation celebration in Ethiopia. Whereas Robinson exemplified the best of black America's commitment to the war, the search for personal glory drove Julian to Northeast Africa. The Trinidadian's misadventure in Ethiopia represented a low point in Ethiopian and New World black interactions. Insubordination to seniors in the army and reports of complaints by several local creditors exposed the dark side of Julian and was the cause of his disgraceful exit from Ethiopia.³⁰

Like the U.S. Constitution, a clause in the British law forbade its subjects from enlisting in foreign armies. The law found its greatest opposition among the pro-Ethiopian activists of the West Indies who repeatedly demanded its rescission. According to the Barbados Advocate, about five hundred Guyanese ex-service men met in Georgetown on October 7, a few days after the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian hostility. They sent a petition to King George V requesting

³⁰Ibid chs. 6 and 7.

the suspension of the anti-foreign enlistment clause so that they could fight in Ethiopia. "Twenty years ago Negroes fought to save white civilization," claimed one of the petitioners. "Surely, they cannot now be refused permission to fight for what they regard as a symbol of their own civilization."³¹

A few days later similar pro-Ethiopian sentiments were expressed in St. Lucia. In a public meeting the islanders called on the colonial office to allow their volunteers to fight in Ethiopia, to reverse the arms embargo against Addis Ababa, and to impose a strict trade sanction on Rome.³²

Jamaica, the major English-speaking Caribbean island, saw the most intensive anti-fascist protest. As early as the summer of 1935, there were talks about a "stalwart battalion" of Jamaicans going to Ethiopia to defend the country from Italy's impending invasion. On October nine, a crowd of fourteen hundred persons gathered in UNIA's Liberty Hall in Kingston to express support for the distant nation. Various distinguished speakers, including Mrs. Ami Jacques Garvey, appealed to the crowd to close ranks with their beleaguered kin in Africa. The attendees signed a petition for the right to fight in Ethiopia in order "to preserve the glories of our

³¹"West Indians Want to Fight," Barbados Advocate October 8, 1935.

³²"St. Lucia to Help Ethiopia," Ibid October 12, 1935.

ancient and beloved empire."³³

When it became clear that Britain was ignoring the West Indians' plea, the islanders' anger against Italy turned anti-British and anti-white. Perhaps because of the colonial officials' preemptive measures, in no instances did these anti-European sentiments translate into a collective colonial revolt.³⁴ All the same, white civilians bore the brunt of the West Indian anti-fascist wrath. Mistaken for an Italian family, a Portuguese residence in Port of Spain was attacked and its national flag torn into shreds by an angry crowd.³⁵ In Georgetown, Guyana, following the closing of several schools owing to rumors that Italian agents were distributing poisoned candies to school children, a white school inspector was similarly mistaken for an Italian and assaulted by an angry mob.³⁶

The Religious Response

³³"Ask Right to Defend Abyssinia," Daily Gleaner October 12, 1935.

³⁴Such preemptive steps included the imposition of curfews, the banning of assemblies and the declaration of a state of emergency. For example, see "Another Peace Proclamation: Assemblage of Persons Forbidden," Port-of-Spain Gazette December 22, 1935.

³⁵"Anti-Italian Feeling Demonstration on Sunday Night: Portuguese Flag Torn up in Error," Port-of-Spain Gazette October 8, 1935.

³⁶Weisbord, "British West Indian Reaction" pp. 34-35.

Just as racial sentiments aroused Caribbean passion for Ethiopia, so did religious factors further antagonize West Indian attitudes toward Italy. Indifferent to international opinion, the Roman Catholic Church had taken a partisan position in the war by tacitly sanctioning Italy's "civilizing mission" to Africa. West Indians found the papacy's controversial role inexcusable. In Trinidad, Catholic-bashing lyrics became popular enough to appear in local song writings. In a 1938 Calypso record, "De Whole World in Confusion," a singer attributed the ever worsening international situation to the unholy alliance between the Vatican, the fascists and the Nazis. The artist identified the evil trinity--Hitler, Mussolini and the Pope--as the main culprits for the continued deterioration of international peace.³⁷

The February 1937 massacre of thousands of Ethiopians, in a drunken orgy of retaliation for the attempted assassination of Rodolfo Graziani, the Italian viceroy in Addis Ababa, inspired a poem of an anti-Catholic tone.³⁸ Appearing in the Barbados Observer of July 12 and again in

³⁷Gordon Rohlehr, Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad (Port of Spain: G. Rohlehr, 1990), p. 318.

³⁸The hand grenade attack, carried out by two Ethiopian patriots of Eritrean backgrounds, and which left Graziani wounded, was a reminder that Italy's conquest of Ethiopia was far from conclusive.

the September issue of Negro Worker, the poem deplored the fascist atrocity and denounced the Catholic Church for its silence in the face of unprecedented evil:

One Roman Church, one Roman pope!
One Roman hangman and one rope!
One Roman cloven-footed God!
One destiny: The Iron Rod!³⁹

Similarly, outside Trinidad and Barbados, so vehement was the Jamaican Catholic bashing that even nominal Catholics found themselves defending the Papacy. Alexander Bustamante, then a prominent labor activist, was one such apologist. Shortly before the war began, Bustamante reminded critics of the pope that the Holy See no longer exercised strong political powers in Europe as it had done centuries earlier. "I am positively certain that if the Pope could prevent Mussolini on his hell-bound determination to exterminate Ethiopians, he would, just as he would prevent Hitler from destroying a peaceful race as the Jews are. . . . In fairness to the Pope, I will say that the criticism against him is unfair, unjust and unwarranted, for every Christian, I am sure, has a desire to prevent Mussolini and the Pope is a Christian."⁴⁰

The anti-white and anti-Catholic manifestation was most

³⁹"Fascism," Negro Worker 7 (September-October 1937), p. 15.

⁴⁰Frank Hill, ed., Bustamante and his Letters (Kingston: Kingston Publishers Press, 1976), p. 68.

apparent among the Rastafarian groups of Jamaica. The Rastas not only perceived the pope as the anti-Christ, but also saw the war as a racial Armageddon. They believed the war would end white domination of the world and usher in a new millennium in which blacks would rule over whites.

In order to understand why Rastafarianism first took roots in Jamaica, mention must be made of that island's rich history in religious "revivalism," most of it associated with slavery and African influences. According to Chevannes, many nineteenth-century Jamaican revivalist sects syncretized Western monotheism with such African religious practices as spirit possession, trans dancing, convulsion, as well as the beliefs in sorcery and the medicineman. Out of this fusion were born expressions of worship native to Jamaica, including Myalism, Pokumina and Kumina.⁴¹

Some of the revivalist groups produced charismatic leaders of Messianic dimensions. In 1895 Alexander Bedward, the 36-year-old Native Baptist preacher, gained wide notoriety for his outspoken denouncement of the white establishment. His incendiary racial rhetoric, which pitted him against the authorities, spread Bedward's fame across the island as a champion of the under-trodden. Allegedly imbued with prophetic and healing powers, during the next two

⁴¹Berry Chevannes, Rastafari and other African-Caribbean World Views (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp. 1-9.

decades Bedward became the most popular Baptist minister in Jamaica. While his subsequent claim of divinity may have alienated some supporters, thousands of Bedwardites still flocked to his church to be baptized or healed.⁴²

Bedward's own growing ambition resulted in his final undoing, however. Having declared himself the son of God, Bedward proclaimed December 13, 1920, to be the day of reckoning. Seated on a chair specially made for the occasion and surrounded by thousands of loyalists, on the said date the self-appointed Savior waited for his heavenly assent. The incident, out of which nothing of the unusual transpired, left the Baptist sect in disarray, and Bedward himself died in obscurity in a mental hospital. The 1920 scandal did not, nonetheless, end the peasantry's hunger for a messianic figurehead, and in the 1930s many ex-Bedwardites would find refuge for their eschatological beliefs in the fledgling sect of Rastafari.⁴³

For West Indians in general, the 1910s and the early 1920s were decades of unprecedented population movement, thanks to the economic boom in North America. A radical religious text introduced to Jamaica during this period along the mass flow of goods and ideas was the "Holy Piby," a black supremacist version of the Bible. First appearing in New York

⁴²Post, Rise ye Starvelings pp. 6-7.

⁴³Ibid pp. 8-9.

and New Jersey, the Holy Piby had reached Central America, South Africa and the English Caribbean by 1925. In Jamaica it was followed a year later by the publication of the "Royal Parchment Scrolls of Black Supremacy," much of whose millenarian ethos became the basis of Rastafarianism.⁴⁴

The 1910s and 1920s also saw the revival of the "back-to-Africa" movement under the leadership of the legendary Marcus Garvey. Although, contrary to a popular folklore, Garvey never made a prophecy about the coming of a race liberator in the form of an African monarch,⁴⁵ the UNIA leader did, nevertheless, hail the coronation of Haile Selassie as a historic moment. "Last Sunday, a great ceremony took place at Addis Ababa, the capital of Abyssinia," Garvey wrote of Haile Selassie's coronation on November 3, 1930. "From reports and expectations, the scene was one of great splendor, and will long be remembered by those who were present. Several of the leading nations of Europe sent representatives to the coronation, thereby paying their respects to a rising Negro nation that is destined to play a great part in the future history of the world."⁴⁶

⁴⁴Robert Hill, "Leonard P. Howell and Millenarian Visions in Early Rastafari," Jamaica Journal 16, 1 (February 1983), p. 27.

⁴⁵Ibid p. 25.

⁴⁶Robert Hill, ed., The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers vol. 7 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 440-41.

In his tributes, Garvey described Haile Selassie as a visionary leader. "Ras Tafari has traveled to Europe and America and is therefore no stranger to European hypocrisy and methods; he, therefore, must be regarded as a kind of a modern Emperor, and from what we understand and know of him, he intends to introduce modern methods and systems into his country." Garvey, a devout Catholic, concluded the piece on Haile Selassie by invoking the biblical verse with which Ethiopia had long been associated. "The Psalmist prophesied that Princes would come out of Egypt and Ethiopia would stretch forth her hands unto God. We have no doubt that the time is now come. Ethiopia is now really stretching forth her hands. . . and it is for us of the Negro race to assist in every way to hold up the hand of Emperor Ras Tafari."⁴⁷

Out of the synthesis of Bedwardism, Garveyism, the Holy Piby and Ethiopian symbolism thus grew the interpretation of the 1930 coronation of Ras Tafari Makonnen--henceforth Emperor Haile Selassie, King of Kings, Elect of God, the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah--as the fulfillment of Scriptural prophecy. To that effect, Rasta doctrinaires found in the Bible several verses that supposedly corroborated their perception of Haile Selassie as the Messiah. Among them was Rev.2:2-5 which the Jamaican ideologues claimed was a direct reference to Haile Selassie: "nd I saw a strong angel

⁴⁷Ibid.

proclaiming with a loud voice: 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals?' . . . Then one of the elders said unto me, 'Weep not, lo, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'"

The 1935-36 war invoked similar self-justificatory verses that strengthened the interpretive basis of Haile Selassie as the long awaited redeemer. The hostility between Ethiopia and Italy was particularly seen as symbolizing the ultimate battle between the forces of good and evil, as foreseen in Rev.19:19, "and I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army." The beast and the kings represented Mussolini and his Western allies, the League of Nations, while Haile Selassie was likened to the Messiah: "him that sat on the horse."⁴⁸

An article that appeared in the Jamaica Times of December 7, 1935, added an equally compelling explanation to the millenarian dimension of the Ethiopian crisis. Attributed

⁴⁸According to Ken Post, Haile Selassie's association with Christ was reinforced by popular photographic portraits that showed him seated on a white horse. Italy's subsequent ejection from Ethiopia in 1941 would also reinforce the monarch's messianic image in connection with Rev.19:20-21: "and the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet {Mussolini} that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." Post, Arise ye the Starvelings p. 172.

to one Frederico Philos, versions of the article were reprinted in European as well as other Jamaican papers. Hoping to arouse a pro-Italian sympathy among whites, Philos described what he claimed was a well organized, clandestine racial movement whose goal was to drive whites out of Africa.

"Up from the depths of the jungle," the Italian agent stated, "and out of the hearts of modern cities, from all parts of the African Continent and from countries where coloured people live, the blacks are flocking to the standard of an organisation which dwarfs all similar federations." The organization was known as "Nyabinghi," which, according to Philos, meant "death to whites."⁴⁹

Established in the Belgian Congo in 1923 by "King Mocambo the Second and his nephew," the movement was now headed by Haile Selassie. Among his followers, Philos went on, "Haile Selassie is regarded as a veritable Messiah, a saviour of the coloured people, the Emperor of the Negro Kingdom. Whenever one mentions the word 'Negus' the eyes of the blacks gleam with a mad fanaticism. They worship him as an idol."⁵⁰

In pre-colonial Southern Uganda and Northern Rwanda, Nyabinghi (or Nyabingi) was a fertility cult associated with social well-being and good harvest. Its rituals involved the

⁴⁹Ibid pp. 203-04.

⁵⁰Ibid.

worshipping of a female spirit or goddess, Nyabinghi: "She who Brings Bounty." With the advent of British and Belgian colonialism, the cult became a rallying point for a fierce anti-European resistance that lasted for nearly two decades early in the 20th century.⁵¹

While news of the Nyabinghi uprising might have reached the Caribbean long before the Italian invasion, the connection between the Central African cult and the Northeast African King was an imaginative literary feat. The timing of the article led many Jamaicans into believing that there indeed existed a conspiratorial anti-white organization under the command of Haile Selassie. As a result, some Rasta loyalists began to refer to themselves as "Nyabinghi warriors," or just as "Nyabinghi." Because of the traditional image of the sound of the drum as a beacon to war, the term Nyabinghi also came to be associated with a special type of drumbeat used for certain Rastafarian rituals known as "reasoning" or "chanting" sessions. Thus, despite the anti-Ethiopian platform that Philos's piece was intended to promote, ironically his article left an indelible etymological mark in the Rastafarian dictionary.

Ethiopian identity questioned

⁵¹Jim Freedman, Nyabingi: The Social History of an African Divinity (Butare, Rwanda: Institut National de Recherche Scientifique, 1984).

Just as Philos's essay hoped to neutralize white support for Ethiopia by invoking the "specter of the black peril,"⁵² another article tried to discourage the Afro-Jamaican anti-fascist enthusiasm by presenting a negative image of Ethiopia. In its November twentieth issue, the Daily Gleaner included a letter from a gentleman who signed his name as Azania, and who found the island's "pro-Ethiopian sentiment" rather vexing. "I cannot help observing that the people of Jamaica are most illogical and short memoried," the author of the letter complained. "They seem unaware of the fact that slavery flourishes like the green bay tree in Abyssinia, and that it is highly unlikely that any of them will be welcomed there except in that capacity."

The writer recounted the unhappy experience of one Jamaican who had journeyed to Ethiopia a few years back "in the firm belief that he was bound for the Promised Land if not for Paradise itself." Robbed and beaten, the traveler barely escaped death and returned to Jamaica with the help of the British consulate. The cynic concluded by suggesting that the two million pound loan, lately requested by the Jamaican legislature from England, should be used to transport pro-Ethiopian politicians and civilians "to the land of their dreams." The permanent removal of such misfits, he observed,

⁵²Post, Rise ye Starvelings p. 172.

would relieve the island of its population pressure as well as solve the unemployment crisis.⁵³

Compared to the countless expressions of anti-fascist sentiments in the Jamaican papers, Azania's and Philos's anti-Ethiopian opinions were on the minority. Many Jamaicans, even those opposed to Rastafarianism, not only maintained a deep reverence for Ethiopia because of its place in the Bible, but they identified with Ethiopians as racial brothers and sisters. The island's leading advocate of Ethiopianism was L. C. Mantle, a self-claimed authority on African history and a regular contributor to Plain Talk, a black-owned newspaper. In Mantle's view, Ethiopia was the living symbol of Africa's golden past and the origin of human civilization. "I am sick and tired to hear so much tomfoolery that the Ethiopians are not Negroes," he wrote in Plain Talk, responding to views like that of Azania's. "Negro" is a term used to denigrate blacks, hence why the Ethiopians reject it, Mantle explained.⁵⁴

What Mantle did not know was the fact that the same racial debate remained one of the most controversial topics of the day among American blacks. In the United States, the question about the Ethiopians' racial identity was tackled by, among others, the Harvard-trained Du Bois and the

⁵³"The Abyssinians," Daily Gleaner November 20, 1935.

⁵⁴Quoted in Post's Arise ye the Starvelings p. 169.

Jamaican-born journalist J. A. Rogers. "Look at the pictures of Abyssinians now widely current," Du Bois begged for common sense. "They are as Negroid as American Negroes. If there is a black race they belong to it." The New Englander agreed that the concept of race was a pseudo-scientific construction as there was no such a thing as a pure black or white or yellow race. "But in the rough and practical assignment of mankind to three divisions, the Ethiopians belong to the black race."⁵⁵

Rogers, drawing on his firsthand experience in Northeast Africa prior to the war, explained that, although Ethiopians regarded diaspora blacks as blood kin, they preferred to think of themselves "as a nation and not as a race." Even though they identified themselves as Africans, they refused to be called "Negro" as the term was long associated with slavery and second class citizenship.⁵⁶ Believing in Ethiopia's potential as a "vast outlet" for African-American technical and educational expertise, the Harlem-based writer recommended the teaching of Amharic in black colleges, for, according to his personal observation,

⁵⁵W. E. B. Du Bois, "Interracial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis: A Negro View," Foreign Affairs 14, 1 (October 1935), p. 82.

⁵⁶J. A. Rogers, The Real Facts about Ethiopia (Atlanta: Atlanta University Woodruff Library Special Collection, 1982), p. 30.

blacks were well received in Ethiopia Provided they manifested no Western "airs of superiority."⁵⁷

Calypso and protest

Whereas political rallies, newspaper editorials and fund raising drives appeared as the dominant features of the North American black reaction to the war, in parts of the Caribbean songs and ballads further complemented the anti-fascist furor. This use of mass culture as an expression of popular protest was particularly common among the Calypsonians of Trinidad. The call to arms by black ex-servicemen at the onset of the fascist aggression became the basis for Houdini's provocative battle cry, "The Ethiopian War Drums," in which he sang:

Black men the bugle call
Come one, come all
The drums are beating and the bugle call
Come one, come all
Don't mind what Mussolini say
Let's march in battle array
And a gun in your hand to defend the Ethiopian
War declare.⁵⁸

Another Calypsonian bard composed "Mussolini Playing de Fool," in which he confidently hoped that the Ethiopians would put Mussolini in his place as they did his forefathers

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Rohlehr, Calypso and Society p. 316.

forty years earlier. This particular composition was reminiscent of the optimism shared among some blacks, especially the Rastafarians, regarding the outcome of the war. It also reflected the heroic and invincible image of Ethiopia that the 1896 Adwa victory had engraved among the non-whites of Africa and the Americas.

Mussolini is only playing de fool,
We know that Ethiopia will bring him cool;
It's the very country that gave him leaks,
It was in the year eighteen-ninety-six.
You know they altered them and they were so sore!
And look at how they're going back for more.
But this time what they'll have to do,
Is to hold Mussolini and alter him too.⁵⁹

Between 1936 and 1938, several well known Calypso artists expressed their racial solidarity with the Ethiopians in a number of compositions, among which were Roaring Lion's "Advantage Mussolini," Ras Kasa's "Abyssinia Lament," Caresser's "Haile Selassie Held by Police," and Growling Tiger's "The Gold," which attributed economic reasons to Mussolini's occupation of Ethiopia.

The gold, the gold,
The gold, the gold,
The gold in Africa
Mussolini want from the Emperor.
Abyssinia appeal to the League for peace
Mussolini actions were like a beast
A villain, a thief, a highway robber
And a shameless dog for a dictator.

⁵⁹Rita Pemberton, "The Ties that Bind: Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean to Ethiopia, 1896-1996," Paper Presented at the Addis Ababa University Adwa Centenary Conference (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1996), pp. 20-21.

He crossed the border and wanted more
The Emperor had no intentions for war
That man I call a criminal
The man destroyed churches and hospitals.
He said expansion he really need
He have forty-five million heads to feed
Why he don't attack the Japanese
England, France, or hang on to Germany?⁶⁰

According to Rohlehr, "The Gold" remained a popular hit for some time, so much so that it made life difficult for Trinidadians of Italian descent. Thus, in the pre-television age, when even the radio was still a novelty, Calypso became a means by which the news of the Italo-Ethiopian war was relayed to the non-literate masses. Such songs further promoted the Ethiopian side of the debate by reducing the complexity of the war into a racial question of right versus wrong, black versus white.

Political Effects of the war

The late 1930s were a period of major political and economic unrest for the entire Caribbean archipelago. The crisis is generally attributed to the decade's worldwide economic slump, which witnessed a drastic fall in the prices of agricultural exports, lowering living standards and wages. A nexus between the Caribbean unrest of the late thirties and the Italo-Ethiopian war has been identified by Horace

⁶⁰Rohlehr, Calypso and Society p. 317.

Campbell, albeit a tenuous one. "The fact that the Ethiopian masses had taken to arms was deliberately used as a device to strengthen the resolve of blacks in the Caribbean to oppose colonialism," Campbell writes, "This resolve led to the violent confrontations which shook the Caribbean beginning in St. Vincent and Guyana in 1935, spreading like bush-fire to Trinidad and Antigua, and erupting in Jamaica in 1938."⁶¹

Being the two largest English-speaking Caribbean colonies, Trinidad and Jamaica were naturally where the labor unrest remained most critical. In the former, the anti-fascist campaign had prompted as early as December 1935 the formation of the short-lived Afro-Asian labor movement, the Trinidad's Citizens' League. Despite a long history of socio-economic rivalry, Trinidad's two major ethnic groups, blacks and East Indians, found themselves sharing a common anti-war platform in their sympathy with Ethiopia. The TCL emerged from an interracial anti-fascist rally in Princes Town at which the concept of Afro-Asian labor solidarity was proposed by Adrian Rienzi, an East Indian lawyer. Rienzi called on both groups to join hands in the anti-imperialist struggle and help in the liberation of Africa and Asia, hence the birth of the first inter-racial labor movement in the island's history. Even though the TCL was disbanded by June

⁶¹Horace Campbell, Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1987), p. 78.

1936 owing to leadership rivalries, some of its core founders went on to play key roles in the island's notorious labor revolt the next year.⁶²

Trinidad's 1937 labor uprising was in part attributed by the island's governor, Sir Murchison Fletcher, to the unresolved "Ethiopian question."⁶³ The claim is supported by contemporary observers who saw the Italo-Ethiopian war as a prelude to racial and working class consciousness.⁶⁴ A central figure in the 1937 historic revolt was Tubal Uriah Butler, one of Rienzi's black associates and co-founder of the TCL.⁶⁵ The recent discovery of oil at Fyzabad, near the town of San Fernando in the south, had led to the demolition of villages surrounding the oil fields, creating a mass of destitute squatters. Speaking at a workers' rally some time in May 1937, Butler drew parallels between the destruction of Fyzabad by the oil prospectors and the destruction of Ethiopia by fascist Italy. The riot that ensued, which claimed the life of a policeman, triggered a series of strikes and boycotts that left the island in a state of

⁶²Kelvin Singh, "Adrian Cola Rienzi and the Labor Movement in Trinidad, 1925-1944," Journal of Caribbean History 16 (1982), p. 17.

⁶³C.L.R. James, History of Negro Revolt (London: Fact Limited, 1938), pp. 78-80.

⁶⁴Yelvington, The War in Ethiopia, pp. 221-23.

⁶⁵Singh, "Adrian Rienzi and the Labor Movement," pp. 17-18.

economic paralysis for the entire summer.⁶⁶

In Jamaica, the racial tension that had been simmering since the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia found an outlet during the 1938 labor unrest. The revolt pitted the island's predominantly black working class against the white and brown planter aristocracy. Supported by the urban middle class and labor right activists, the workers demanded higher wages, better and more humane working conditions and political liberalization. The boycotts and strikes, which led to the fatal shooting of several workers by the police, ended only after the planters agreed to raise farm wages and to improve living and working conditions.⁶⁷

The 1937-38 West Indian unrest influenced the implementation of a series of labor reforms that legalized trade unions and made the legislative bodies more representative. By 1945 there were about sixty-five Caribbean trade unions many of which later grew into political parties. The Caribbean labor revolt of the late 1930s and the accompanying reforms rendered old-style colonial rule obsolete and ushered in a period of transition towards self-government and independence.⁶⁸

⁶⁶W. R. Jacobs, Butler Versus the King (Port of Spain: Key Caribbean Publications, 1967), p. 68 and p. 193; James, History of Negro Revolt p. 77.

⁶⁷Campbell, Rasta and Resistance pp. 81-85.

⁶⁸J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock, A Short History of the

The Black Intelligentsia and its Response

As discussed in the preceding section, Caribbean and American blacks reacted uniformly to the Italo-Ethiopian war at the grassroots level. The exact detail of the response might have slightly varied from community to community, or nation to nation. In general, however, the anti-fascist cause provided ordinary blacks a common political platform and an unprecedented sense of internationalism. Unlike the grassroots' mobilization, the intellectuals' reaction varied greatly, class and ideological orientations often the determinant factors. The "class versus racial" debate over the roots of the Italo-Ethiopian war revealed a consistent rift between West Indian and African-American ideologues, and in so doing underscored a fundamental difference in their socio-political traditions.

The African-American Left

Compared to the average person on the street, mainstream African-American professionals, intellectuals and artists responded to the Ethiopian call rather ambivalently. Although the black elite no doubt shared in the pro-Ethiopian

West Indies (New York: St. Martin Press, 1971), pp. 290-92.

sentiment, few of its influential voices went beyond the simple act of denouncing Italy's acts of aggression in the print media. A case of exception were the action-oriented leftists, many of whom closed ranks with the urban underclass in the effort to save Ethiopia.⁶⁹ "To channel the black masses' burgeoning anger into disciplined action that was antifascist rather than antiwhite and to solidify the Party's base among African-Americans," Scott writes, "Harlem communists sought to form a united front of colored organizations and individuals dedicated to the defense of black Ethiopia."⁷⁰

The conspicuous presence of the black left in the anti-fascist protest was not an impromptu phenomenon. By the early thirties communism had gained a strong foothold in the American political landscape, thanks to the unparalleled economic crisis of modern times. Even the historically conservative South was not immune to what was referred to as Red infiltration. In Alabama, for instance, because of the relentless legal crusade on behalf of the Scottsboro defendants by the International Labor Defense, ILD, many blacks joined the Communist Party, which became so popular that it threatened the political power base of the NAACP.⁷¹

⁶⁹Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 40-43 and 52-53.

⁷⁰Ibid p. 108.

⁷¹Robin Kelly, Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during

Notwithstanding Russia's continuous sale of strategic war materials to Italy, black American leftists made no attempt to sever ties with Moscow. Among those blacks who enjoyed close ties with the Soviets during the war included Benjamin Davis, editor of the Daily Worker; Max Yergan, a peripatetic international agitator; James W. Ford, Harlem's full-time Party activist; the novelist Richard Wright; and the renowned singer and actor Paul Robinson.

Ford, the Party's vice presidential candidate in 1932, articulated the overall sentiment of the black left in a series of publications. Identifying economic interest as the main motive behind Italy's policy of expansionism in Africa, Ford called upon all progressive forces to oppose the war not for racial reasons but as part of the international struggle against imperialism. He reminded his readers of the thousands of Italian labor activists and Party members who became victims of il-Duce's domestic persecution. Since workers everywhere had denounced Mussolini's colonial grandeur, he argued, it was only practical that white and black toilers should forget about race differences and form a united front against fascism.⁷²

the Great Depression (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 78-91.

⁷²James W. Ford and Harry Gannes, War in Africa: Italian Fascism Prepares to Enslave Ethiopia (New York: Workers' Library Publishers, 1935), pp. 27-28.

In September 1935, just before the outbreak of war, Ford led a team of African-Americans to Geneva to meet with Ethiopia's ambassador to the League of Nations, Bedjironde Tekle Hawariat. During the meeting, Tekle Hawariat reminded his American guests that Ethiopia had no need for foreign fighters as the country had enough local volunteers. What Ethiopians wanted from their racial cousins abroad was, instead, material and financial support.⁷³

The Ambassador's explanation reinforced the communists' conviction about what needed to be done. Ford insisted that the idea of sending thousands of black volunteers to Africa was diplomatically impractical, for the colonial powers would not permit a sea passage to any such expedition. What Ethiopians rather needed was more modern armaments, including machine guns and ammunition, with which they could defend themselves. "It would seem, therefore, that the more practical thing to do in this connection would be to send every penny we could raise to help the people of Ethiopia procure these things."⁷⁴

Even though Ford's call met with little success, his group, the Harlem branch of the Communist Party, was responsible for bringing together the various Ethiopian

⁷³James W. Ford, The Communists and the Struggle for Negro Liberation (Harlem: Harlem division of the Communist Party, N.D.), pp. 30-32.

⁷⁴Ford and Gannes, War in Africa pp. 28-29.

defense societies under the coalition of United Aid for Ethiopia. It was also credited with coordinating a series of interracial campaigns, including the anti-war demonstration on August 3rd 1935, in which more than twenty thousand white and black New Yorkers reportedly took part.⁷⁵

The Caribbean Left

The great depression coincided with the radicalization of the European-based Caribbean intelligentsia. But unlike in the U.S., where the black left remained subservient to Moscow throughout the war years, for the West Indian Marxists the Italo-Ethiopian hostility became a source of ideological retreat. For the Caribbean intelligentsia, in other words, the war marked a point of transition from class-driven political activism to race-oriented pan-African nationalism.⁷⁶

Most prominent among the Caribbean leftist thinkers of the 1930s was Malcolm Nurse, alias George Padmore. Born and brought up in Trinidad, Padmore became associated with the

⁷⁵Major anti-fascist protests were held simultaneously in various cities across the East Coast on the same day. They were attended by anti-war activists of all races, including Italian-Americans. See "International Actions in Support of Abyssinia," Negro Worker 5, 9 (September 1935), pp. 12-13.

⁷⁶Judith Stein, The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 270.

radical left as a student at Howard University in the 1920s. In 1929 the West Indian activist relocated to Moscow to work for the Communist International or the Comintern, and two years later was appointed editor of the Hamburg-based Marxist periodical, the Negro Worker, organ of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, ITUCNW.⁷⁷

While on the one hand the Negro Worker joined in the struggle for racial justice in Europe and America, on the other hand it fought against race consciousness as a reactionary concept so designed by the bourgeois thinkers as to antagonize the working class along color lines. In its issue of November 1932, Padmore cautioned against the "so-called Negro leaders" who were trying to create the impression that all dark-skinned peoples, whether rich or poor, had the same political interest. He reminded his readers that "in all capitalist countries whether the population happens to be white as in Europe, yellow as in Japan and China, brown as in India, or black as in Liberia and Haiti, it is not color that counts but class."⁷⁸

The Trinidadian Marxist insisted that "Lenin was not only the leader of Russian toilers, but was the greatest

⁷⁷James R. Hooker, Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), pp. 1-22.

⁷⁸George Padmore, "Fifteen Years of Soviet Russia," Negro Worker 2, 11-12 (1932), p. 31.

champion and fighter for the freedom of all other oppressed peoples, including the terribly exploited and oppressed Negroes in Africa, America and the West Indies."⁷⁹ "Let these 15 years of Soviet power be the greatest inspiration to us and our struggle for national freedom and social emancipation."⁸⁰

The year 1933 was a tense period in Europe as it marked the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism to power. The Soviets reacted quickly by temporarily disbanding the ITUCNW, the Moscow-sponsored anti-colonial organization, in order to improve relations with the West and thereby isolate the Slavophobic Nazi leadership. To protest Moscow's sudden volte-face, Padmore resigned his position as the editor of the Negro Worker, thus his expulsion from the Comintern.⁸¹ Padmore's example was emulated by Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Garan Kouyate of French West Africa, both of whom abandoned their positions as assistant editors of the paper.⁸² After some lapse in its publication, the Negro Worker moved its

⁷⁹Ibid p. 28.

⁸⁰Ibid p. 31.

⁸¹Hooker, Black Revolutionary pp. 30-32.

⁸²For ITUCNW's official communique on the expulsions, see "The Expulsion of Garan Kouyate," Negro Worker 4, 1 (May 1934); and "The Expulsion of George Padmore from the Revolutionary Movement," Ibid 4, 2 (June 1934). Kenyatta's removal was not reported except that his name no longer appeared in the journal's editorial staff list after May 1934.

editorial office from Hamburg to Copenhagen and then permanently to Paris, from where it continued its mouthpiece role as an organ of the newly reinstated ITUCNW.⁸³

Following the news that the Soviets were supplying Mussolini's war machine with oil and other essential materials, in May 1935 Padmore wrote an article from London expressing his disillusionment with communism. The Italo-Ethiopian crisis "should serve to open the eyes of Negroes the world over that white nations, regardless of their political systems, have no scruples in joining hands and assigning parts of Africa to whichever one stands most in need of colonies."⁸⁴

Writing of the racial significance of the Italo-Ethiopian war decades later, Padmore would repeat the above charge in almost the same words:

The brutal rape of Ethiopia combined with the cynical attitude of the great powers convinced Africans and peoples of African descent everywhere that black men had no rights which white men felt bound to respect if they stood in the way of their imperialist interests. Not only did the Western Powers turn a deaf ear to the Emperor's appeal to the League of Nations for help, but actually connived at Mussolini's gassing of defenseless Ethiopians by selling oil to the dictator. With the realization of their utter defenselessness against the new aggression from Europeans in Africa, the blacks felt it necessary to look to

⁸³Ibid: see the editorial of the May 1934 issue.

⁸⁴George Padmore, "Ethiopia and World Politics," Crisis 42 (May 1935), p. 138.

themselves.⁸⁵

George Thomas Nathaniel Griffith, alias T. R. Makonnen, was another West Indian activist who, like Padmore, metamorphosed from a Marxist ideologue to a pan-African nationalist. Born in British Guyana at the beginning of the century, he moved to the U.S. in the late 1920s. While studying agriculture and animal husbandry at Cornell University in New York, he became closely acquainted with Garveyite activists and some Ethiopian students from the nearby colleges. He changed his last name from Griffith to Ras Makonnen, explaining in his memoir that his grandfather was an Ethiopian miner who migrated to Guyana in the 1880s.⁸⁶

In 1935 Makonnen left New York for Europe as an intern at a Danish agricultural co-op. His experience with the Danish left convinced him, thanks to the crisis in Ethiopia, of the movement's double standard when it came to the issue of race. Denmark was exporting mustard to Italian industries with full knowledge that it was going to be converted into mustard gas for use in Ethiopia, but the trade with fascism raised no eyebrows even among the most militant of the socialist vanguard. Makonnen in fact found out that the Scandinavian left was "in some difficulty over the attitude

⁸⁵George Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism (New York: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 123-24.

⁸⁶T. R. Makonnen, Pan-Africanism from Within (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. IX-X and 11-12.

to intervention in the Italo-Ethiopian war." After criticizing publicly Denmark's trade links with fascist Italy, Makonnen was arrested and deported to England where he devoutly joined the emergent pan-African circle, an offshoot of the pro-Ethiopian defense movement.⁸⁷

Not every Caribbean Marxist felt ideologically disillusioned by the communists' duplicitous role. But even on those few hard core Caribbean leftists who remained steadfast to Party doctrine, the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was not without racial ramifications. The Trinidadian-born C.L.R. James--a childhood friend of Padmore--had in the mid-thirties gained prominence within the British Trotskyists' circle. Naturally, the Stalin-Mussolini economic love affair posed no ideological dilemma on the Trotskyists, and James did not have to apologize for the Soviet action nor denounce his party affiliation. Nonetheless, contrary to his white colleagues who explained the war solely in economic terms, James interpreted the Italian aggression as both a racially and imperially driven phenomenon. In his opinion the war was a perfect proof to all blacks of the "incredible savagery and duplicity of European imperialism in its quest for markets and raw materials."⁸⁸ At a deeper level, the war persuaded James about the practicality of race consciousness as a tool

⁸⁷Makonnen, Pan-Africanism from Within pp. 111-14.

⁸⁸Esedebe, Pan-Africanism p. 118.

for organizing the black working class into a well-disciplined political force. He communicated this point as early as 1938 in his "Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question," in which he called for the creation of an independent black political party no longer subject to white control.⁸⁹

If the war exercised a mellowing influence on the young West Indians and their class rhetoric, it had the opposite impact on Harold Moody and his LCP, the League of Colored Peoples. Founded and chaired by Moody, a Jamaican medical practitioner married to an English woman, the London-based LCP had by its non-militant nature exerted a positive influence on the British public in the 1930s.⁹⁰ "Most of its work consisted of providing social service and informal gatherings for West Indian and African students in London." The League's politics was characterized by a friendly critic as "mild politics, or, if you like, harassing the goody-goody elements in Britain."⁹¹

Because of Moody's compromising and passivist position on racial matters, the LCP was initially dismissed as a

⁸⁹Scott McLemee, ed., C.L.R. James on "The Negro Question," (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), see ch. 1.

⁹⁰Judith Stein, The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), pp. 268-69.

⁹¹Quoted in Ibid p. 269.

sycophantic organization by the young radicals. The war provided Moody with an ideal opportunity to disprove this image. In September 1935 the LCP passed strong anti-war and anti-colonial resolutions, becoming henceforth an important pressure group in the pro-Ethiopian campaign.⁹² Despite their ideological and tactical differences, from that point on Moody and the young radicals like Makonnen and Padmore continued to engage in parallel if not in joint actions to advance black interest.⁹³ Relations between the League and the nationalists remained amicable throughout the war years, and the latter were particularly grateful to Moody for letting them express their ideas and beliefs in the LCP's journal, Keys.⁹⁴

Garvey and the black right wing

Not every Caribbean activist followed the examples of James, Makonnen, Padmore, or Moody. Several months before the outbreak of hostilities, Garvey had left Jamaica for England in order to start a new political life. He was now a minor

⁹²For the actual resolutions, see David A. Vaughan, Negro Victory: The Life Story of Doctor Harold Moody (London: Independent Limited Press, 1950), p. 81.

⁹³Peter Fryer, Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 128-29.

⁹⁴Stein, World of Marcus Garvey p. 269.

figure, his attempts to revive the heyday of the UNIA having failed. Despite his ebbing fortune, Garvey continued to publish a monthly magazine, Black Man, in which the Italo-Ethiopian crisis was featured regularly.⁹⁵ In one issue he bitterly denounced Italian bombardment of Ethiopian civilian centers with poison gas as the most barbaric act of the age. "Mussolini's hope for glory is based on Roman tradition," he blasted the Italian leader, in his characteristic bravado. "Probably, if he is not made a 'saint' immediately or sometime after his death, he will be referred to as one of the 'gods' of modern Italy. The only thing is that he will not be a myth, like the old Roman gods, but will be remembered as a real 'brute god' who plagued the twentieth century with his inhumanity."⁹⁶

While most Garveyites in the Americas showed unwavering support for Ethiopia, in London Garvey's own commitment to the African cause was short-lived. Having arrived in Britain in June 1936 to form a government in exile, Haile Selassie had kept himself aloof from Garvey and other black militants, preferring instead to advance his country's cause through formal diplomatic channels. Perceived as a sign of racial

⁹⁵Edmund David Cronon, Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 157-62.

⁹⁶Marcus Garvey, "The War," Black Man 1, 10 (October 1935), p. 1.

insensibility, the king's distant and demure air provided a powerful ammunition to his detractors, one of whom turned out to be Garvey himself.

A common, unsubstantiated explanation for the fall-out between Garvey and Tefari is that the latter rebuffed the Jamaican's request for a personal conference.⁹⁷ While such might be a rational response by any head of state, given Garvey's maligned image in mainstream circles, there is no evidence that Garvey indeed proposed a meeting with Haile Selassie which the latter rejected. The likelihood is that Garvey, a racial nationalist, interpreted the attention shown to Haile Selassie by the English aristocracy as proof of the monarch's disavowal of his African identity. Infuriated by this seemingly unpatriotic action, the UNIA leader unleashed sharp attacks on the emperor.⁹⁸ Haile Selassie allowed slavery to flourish under his reign, Black Man charged, giving Italy the needed excuse for war. By keeping his subjects in a backward state of poverty and ignorance, by "playing white" and by surrounding himself with European

⁹⁷See Cronon, Black Moses p. 162; Stein, World of Marcus Garvey p. 270.

⁹⁸Whatever Garvey's motives may have been, it was not long before his criticisms were proven wrong. Haile selassie did meet with a group of African-American emissaries later on, and the encounter was reported as cordial by the parties present. See Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race p. 167.

flatterers, Haile Selassie caused Ethiopia's defeat.⁹⁹

Such pro-fascist editorials catapulted the almost-forgotten Garvey back to public attention, albeit as a controversial and divisive figure. Following his vilification of Haile Selassie, the Jamaican ex-legend was accused of being a sell-out to Mussolini's propaganda machine. Among his denouncers were a group of Harlem notables, who wrote to the widely-read Amsterdam News to register their disappointment in the fallen race hero: "We, a group of American Negro citizens, who are deeply interested in the same cause of Ethiopia, and who have contributed to the Haile Selassie fund as administered by Dr. Malaku E. Bayen, . . . have read with surprise, and not a little chagrin and indignation, the release from Marcus Garvey of London, in which he advises American Negroes not to support the cause of Ethiopia because it is a 'lost cause.'"¹⁰⁰

Over the touchy issue of slavery, a certain Una Brown of New York wrote directly to Garvey, explaining the qualitative difference between Western slavery and its African variant. "You speak about slavery in Abyssinia as though it was the kind of slavery we were put in by the Europeans," she rebutted. "King Menelik's mother was a slave.

⁹⁹Garvey, "Italy's Conquest," Black Man 2, 2 (July-August 1936), pp. 4-6.

¹⁰⁰Hill, Garvey and UNIA Papers Vol. 7, pp. 722-26.

That's the facility Abyssinian slavery may have." Garvey was unimpressed by the distinction between the more degrading form of chattel slavery, commonly associated with plantation America, and the benign form of African servitude, in which captives had easier access to manumission and upward social mobility. Garvey's response to the New Yorker in fact bore a biting sarcasm. "I cannot understand you at all when you try to condone slavery among Negroes. If you like the kind of slavery that the Abyssinians have been kept in by their government, why didn't you go there and live under it. Probably you would have been an Empress later on."¹⁰¹

Garvey's magnetic charisma and unparalleled oratory helped him connect to the masses and their visceral racial sentiments. He was a young man of 27 when he founded the United Negro Improvement Association in Kingston in 1914. Three years later, UNIA's headquarters moved to Harlem's Liberty Hall, branches mushroomed in no less than 30 American cities, claiming as many as four million members by 1920.

A disciple of Booker T. Washington's philosophy of economic nationalism, the Jamaican immigrant launched a maritime business venture through the establishment of a shipping company, the Black Star Line, which later proved to be the source of his undoing. The shipping line demonstrated that the UNIA leader, although a successful fund raiser,

¹⁰¹Ibid pp. 698-700.

lacked organizational skills and adequate business acumen, making him an easy prey to charlatans and flatterers with get-rich-quick schemes. On top of this, his domineering personality, intolerance to criticism, and, most of all, his endorsement of the KKK for its anti-integrationist philosophy, created a powerful opposition against him by the influential black elite. By 1923, UNIA's Black Star Line had gone bankrupt, its fleet of ships either auctioned below market price or declared unseaworthy. Two years later, his political opponents, together with government agents, scored a major point when the self-acclaimed Provisional President of Africa was tried and sentenced for five years in prison, supposedly for sending out misleading or false business advertisements through the U.S. mail.¹⁰²

In 1927, after a half-served term in the Atlanta federal penitentiary, Garvey's prison time was commuted by President Coolidge, after which he was deported to Jamaica. As a realistic measure of self-initiation to island politics, Garvey for a time tried his luck in local elections. He ran for a seat in the legislature, but was severely defeated at the polls because many of his working class followers could not vote. His love of pomp and pageantry might have mesmerized the man on the street, but it could not transcend Caribbean class barriers. Unable to command a national

¹⁰²Cronon, Black Moses see chs. 4 and 5.

support in Jamaica, where class and color gradations mattered more than in black America, Garvey relocated in London in the midst of the great depression where he hoped to reinvent himself politically.¹⁰³

Unfortunately, Garvey's questionable stance over the Ethiopian war became the last straw in his political downhill. His visit to the West Indies in the fall of 1937, in the midst of an ongoing labor unrest, was mostly a source of embarrassment for his remaining admirers. Prior to his arrival in Trinidad in October, "the Sunday Guardian reported that Garvey maintained that the strikers were being used by communists based in London and associated with the International African Service Bureau--a reference to James and others." He dismissed Buttler and other local strike leaders as "agitators" who were "being used as pawns in the political game." Garvey was ostracized by local UNIA activists for his anti-labor statement, and a local paper described him as harboring "little sympathy for the poor." While in the nearby island of St. Lucia, Garvey renounced his remarks about the Trinidadian strikers, but the atonement did not fully rehabilitate his image. The boomerang effect of his anti-Haile Selassie and anti-trade union editorials was so apparent that Garvey left for England without seeing his native Jamaica, where the labor revolt was even more

¹⁰³Stein, World of Marcus Garvey pp. 260-65.

momentous.¹⁰⁴

Garvey's deteriorating public image coincided with a sharp decline in his health. Exacerbated by London's smog, his asthmatic condition grew progressively worse through the late thirties. In September 1938, his wife and two children left for the warmer climate in Jamaica, but Garvey decided to stick it out in London contrary to his doctor's advice. In January 1940 he suffered a stroke, which left him speechless and paralyzed on one side. Perhaps in confusion with the death of Melaku Bayen, the Harlem-based black nationalist and founder of the Ethiopian World Federation, in May 1940 Garvey was reported dead by overzealous media, and the convalescing patient was confronted by the morbid fact of having to read his obituaries, most of them unfavorable, while still alive. Garvey died on June 10, weeks after his rumored demise, at the relatively young age of 53.¹⁰⁵ His remains were later transferred from London to Kingston and given a state burial. Haile Selassie would visit Jamaica in 1966 and, to the surprise of many critics, become the first African head of state to pay homage to the Marcus Garvey memorial monument.

ideological controversies over japan

¹⁰⁴Yelvington, "The War in Ethiopia," p. 223.

¹⁰⁵Stein, World of Marcus Garvey pp. 266-71; Cronon, Black Moses pp. 167-68.

As the leading political power of the non-white world, in the 1930s Japan had aroused popular interest among black intellectuals. Some black thinkers cited Japan's rapid industrial growth to debunk the myth of the white man's scientific supremacy, while others toyed with the idea of forging a unity of colored people under the leadership of Japan. Not surprisingly, a particular proponent of this latter view were a number of Japanese intellectuals motivated by a sense of political pragmatism and national honor. Tokyo's colonial adventures in China had turned Japan into an international pariah, leading to its eventual expulsion from the League of Nations. Japan then looked for racial allies in the non-white masses of Africa and North America. Politically, such racial associations would give Japan a leadership role among weaker nations thereby enhancing its prestige, or so the Japanese thought. Economically, too, not only would such less developed nations provide Japan with badly needed raw materials, but also serve as ready markets for Japanese manufacturers.

Of the existing independent black states, no one took the Japanese diplomatic overtures more seriously than did Ethiopia. In 1930 Japan had sent a delegation to Ethiopia to attend Haile Selassie's coronation ceremony. In return, the Ethiopian foreign minister, Heruy Wolde-Selassie, visited

Japan exactly a year later. The same year also marked the signing of the Ethio-Japanese commercial treaty as well as the writing of Ethiopia's first constitutional document modeled after that of Japan. On top of this were certain superficial historical similarities between the two countries, as well as Heruy's own positive impressions of the Orient as described in his Japan: Mahdere Birhan, all of which gave rise to a group of Ethiopian intellectuals, the Young Japanizers, who saw Japan as the perfect development model for Ethiopia."¹⁰⁶

Whereas some blacks saw the love affair between Ethiopia and Japan as a positive signal toward an eminent unity of the non-white forces, others received the same news with great skepticism. The European-based Caribbean radicals generally underplayed the significance of Japan to the anti-colonial struggle. As early as 1933, Padmore described the Japanese as being another imperial power and questioned their sincerity in signing the commercial treaty with Ethiopia. In the essay, Padmore recognized the presence of some compelling "similarities" between Ethiopian and Japanese historical experiences. Both countries had the longest imperial traditions in the world--the Ethiopians tracing their dynastic root to King Solomon, and the Japanese to the Sun

¹⁰⁶See Bahru Zewde's The Ethiopian Intelligentsia and the Italo-Ethiopian War.

Goddess. Both countries had jealously guarded their national independence after winning major decisive battles against European powers--Ethiopia against Italy in 1896, Japan against Russia nine years later. Both societies had undergone a long period of feudalism. Both had now embarked into a period of rapid modernization, though Ethiopia lagged far behind Japan on this.¹⁰⁷

Despite such parallels, Padmore down played the significance of the Ethio-Japanese alliance to the colored world. "It is to be hoped," he wrote, "that the Ethiopians have no illusions about the Japanese imperialists, when their internal and external policies are quite as ruthless as the white imperialist nations." Too smeared was Japan with the "blood of millions of Koreans and Chinese" for it to become the champion of the "darker races."¹⁰⁸

Unlike in Europe, the pro-Ethiopian lobby in America found itself divided over the attitude to Japan. Leftist ideologues condemned the Japanese invasion of China as vigorously as they denounced Italian atrocities in Ethiopia. Their opponents on the other side excused Japan's aggression of China as an intra-racial conflict, and some even went as far as equating Japan with Ethiopia as a victim of

¹⁰⁷George Padmore, "Ethiopia Today," in Nancy Cunard's Negro: 1931-1933 (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), p. 612.

¹⁰⁸Ibid p. 617.

international conspiracy. In an article published in Foreign Affairs, W. E. B. Du Bois made no secret of his sympathy for Japan. Being the only unconquered non-white nation, Japan was the "logical leader" of the colored peoples, he declared. Du Bois made important distinctions between the Sino-Japanese conflict and the Italo-Ethiopian hostility. Although a colonial power, the Japanese did not use racial justification for their East Asian conquest, since both the conqueror and the conquered belonged to the same race. He predicted that the Japanese would have no problem assimilating or being assimilated by their Asian subjects, whereas the opposite was true for the white colonialists in Africa. For Du Bois, therefore, the Ethiopians would have much more to fear and suffer from Italy's occupation than would the Chinese under Japanese rule. "Conquest and exploitation are brute facts of the present era, yet if they must come, is it better that they come from members of your own or other races? To this question Italy is giving a terrible answer."¹⁰⁹

Du Bois' article reflected the sentiment of thousands of blacks of his time. The late 1930s saw the rise of a militant black group called the Ethiopian Pacific League, also known as Tojo's Movement because of its ties with Japan. Just as the communists had looked towards the Soviet Union as

¹⁰⁹W. E. B. Du Bois, "Interracial Implications of the Ethiopian Crisis" p. 82.

the leader of the oppressed world, so did members of this group view Japan as the defender of the non-white peoples. With an estimated membership of five hundred to five thousand, the Ethiopian Pacific League was founded by a Jamaican immigrant, Leonard Robert Jordan. The movement, "another ideological child of Garveyism,"¹¹⁰ was discreetly funded by Japanese propagandists as part of Japan's overall strategy to win support among the colored masses for its China policy. Jordan himself was later arrested by the FBI and sentenced for ten years in prison for working closely with Japanese agents and for promoting pro-Nazi and pro-Japanese propaganda.¹¹¹

The first American critic of the Afro-Japanese alliance was none other than James Ford. The communist ideologue stated that certain black leaders, supported by Japanese agents, had embraced the Japanese as "friends of the Ethiopian people" under the notion that Japan was the defender "of the so-called darker races" against European domination. For Ford, the Ethiopian war was a struggle against imperialism, and Japan was an imperialist nation. One had only to recall Japanese colonialism in Korea, or its 1933

¹¹⁰Cronon, Black Moses p. 166.

¹¹¹Robert Hill, ed., The FBI's RACON: Racial Condition in the U.S. During World War II (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995), pp. 531-35; Roi Ottley, New World a-Coming (New York: Arno Press, 1968), pp. 234-40.

invasion of Manchuria, to understand the "fallacy of this darker race theory."¹¹²

In a similar attack on the black media for its pro-Japanese inclination, Max Yergan followed up Ford's denunciation of the proponents of Afro-Japanese unity. Like Ford, Yergan argued that imperialism knew not color bounds. He associated the Japanese presence in China with Italian occupation of Ethiopia, Germany's irredentist claim over parts of Central Europe, or the rise of international fascism in Spain. On the one hand, a victory of any of these imperialist forces directly or indirectly affected the fate of blacks and other minorities, Yergan stated. "On the other hand, a strong free democratic China, as would a free Ethiopia and Spain, will become an inspiration and bulwark to struggling peoples everywhere," he observed.¹¹³

The wartime preoccupation with Japan and Ethiopia, as discussed above, had two overall consequences on the black intelligentsia. First, it confirmed the assertion by John Hope Franklin, the leading African-American historian, that the Italo-Ethiopian war created an international-minded Negro citizenry.¹¹⁴ Second, the split of attitudes over Japan and

¹¹²Ford and Gannes, War in Africa pp. 28 and 9-10.

¹¹³Max Yergan, "Answer to Japanese Propaganda Among the American Negroes," China Today 5, 8 (May 1939), pp. 9-19.

¹¹⁴Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom p. 385.

Ethiopia demonstrated that black intellectuals no longer entertained uniformic views on international issues. At the turn of the century the major preoccupation among a number of pan-African thinkers had been the promotion of racial alliance among blacks globally. The Italo-Ethiopian war infused a more complex flavor in the history of pan-Africanism as it expanded the debate on black nationalism into class versus racial, national versus international, emotional versus ideological, and justice versus expedience.

African nationalists awakened

A natural sequitur to the 1935-36 pro-Ethiopian agitation in North America is the question "then what?" A simple answer is that not much came out of it. The failure by blacks to affect the outcome of the war in any way meaningful was a crude reminder of the sad reality of their political helplessness and second class citizenship. With the aftertastes of guilt and cynicism, they resignedly accepted the news of Ethiopian defeat.

As for those blacks who threw their lots with the communists in the hope to save Ethiopia, they discovered, late though it was, that the Party was doing little more than paying lip service to their cause. Disillusioned, most of the black Party members and fellow travelers distanced themselves

from the Party in protest. Having relocated from England to the U.S. in 1938, the Trinidadian C.L.R. James thus observed firsthand the connection between the Italo-Ethiopian war and the crisis of the African-American left:

The C.P. has lost 1,579 or 79% of its Negro membership during the last year in New York State alone. . . . First of all, that Russia sold oil to Italy made a disastrous impression on the blacks. Yet many Negro party members remained. What seems to have been a decisive factor was the activity in regard to Spain and China and its lack of activity in regard to Ethiopia. 'Every day it is only Spain, Spain, China, Spain, but nothing done for Ethiopia except one or two meager processions around Harlem.' . . . The contrast with Spain has been too glaring, and when the C.P. entirely neglected the West Indian situation, the Negroes became finally conscious that they were once more the dupes of "another white party."¹¹⁵

While in the long term the scandal over Ethiopia, as stated by James, ended the love affair between a segment of the black intelligentsia and the American Communist Party, in the short term it discredited the black left and its vanguard role in the pro-Ethiopian protest. In 1937 the communist-led United Aid for Ethiopia was replaced by the Ethiopian World Federation, a nationalist group founded by Melaku Bayen. Although the EWF continued to propagate the Ethiopian cause through its weekly pamphlet, the Voice of Ethiopia, it could no longer muster a cross-sectional support so as to become a mainstream political movement. The problem was further compounded by the eroding image of Ethiopia as a symbol of

¹¹⁵McLemee, On "The Negro Question" p. 5.

race pride following Italy's seemingly perpetual conquest of the country and Haile Selassie's flight abroad. Finally, the untimely death of Melaku Bayen in 1940, threw the movement in disarray by depriving it of a central leadership figure. Although a small number of black Americans traveled to Ethiopia as sojourners in the 1940s, for all practical purposes the country faded out from post-war African-American political consciousness.

It was outside the United States where the Italo-Ethiopian war endured profound impacts. In Africa and the Caribbean, the Ethiopian tragedy created a heightened sense of pan-African nationalism that went beyond the war years. As discussed in the previous section, the Italo-Ethiopian war partially contributed to the West Indian socio-political transformation during the late thirties. In conjunction with the great depression, the Ethiopian crisis created an acute racial tension which precipitated a major labor revolt, and which in turn called for the implementation of various progressive reform laws.

On the African side, the war did not invoke as obviously immediate and explicit consequences as it did in the Caribbean. In the long term, nonetheless, the Ethiopian dispute held a crucial chapter in the history of African decolonization. As S. K. B. Asante argued, by the 1920s the phase of active anti-colonial resistance had ended, with the

mission-educated Africans taking over the political role of the traditional chiefs. Because of their exposure to Western Christianity and modern education, the post-world war I African leaders appreciated the political and cultural values of the metropolises and hoped that their own societies would evolve to be like them. The betrayal of Ethiopia by the League of Nations and the cynicism that it created among blacks towards the great powers ended such optimism, and the call for immediate self-government replaced the doctrine of gradual evolution.¹¹⁶

A. Aduboahen, the renowned African historian, agrees with Asante's interpretation of the Italo-Ethiopian hostility as the watershed point in the birth of modern African nationalism. Aduboahen presents the 1935-36 war as the first in a series of events that sparked the drive toward African independence. He thus writes, "The Italian occupation of Ethiopia was on the one hand the epilogue to or the last act of the long drama in the European scramble for Africa and on the other the curtain-raiser to the new drama which ended in the sixties with the dismantling of colonialism in Africa." The fascist invasion of Africa's most sacred nation shattered the illusion in gradual self-government and made the resort to armed struggle inevitable. Had it not been for the

¹¹⁶S. K. B. Asante, Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941 (London: Longman, 1977), p.181.

outbreak of European war, Aduboahen concludes, "the revolution for independence would have been launched in the late thirties rather than in the late forties."¹¹⁷

In corroboration with the above thesis, a number of African statesmen who came of age during the 1930s also saw the Italo-Ethiopian crisis as an important turning point in their political maturity. When the Italo-Ethiopian war broke out, Kwame Nkrumah was in London on his way to the United States for higher studies. In his autobiography, he wrote that, upon hearing the news of the invasion, he felt as if the whole world had declared war on him personally. The rage made him envisage the role he might one-day play in helping bring about the end of colonialism. "My nationalism surged to the fore," he remembered; "I was ready and willing to go through hell itself, if need be, in order to achieve my object."¹¹⁸

Nelson Mandela was a teenager when the Italian onslaught on Ethiopia began. In his memoir written more than half a century later, Mandela recollects the war as having made a deep impression on him. "I was seventeen when Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, an invasion that spurred not only my hatred of that despot but of fascism in general."

¹¹⁷A. Aduboahen, African Perspectives on Colonialism (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 91.

¹¹⁸Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah (New York: International Publishers, 1957), p. 27.

More than the mere invasion of an African nation by a European power, what infuriated Mandela was that Italy's aggression was targeted on the country that meant much to him. "Ethiopia has always held a special place in my imagination and the prospect of visiting Ethiopia attracted me more strongly than a trip to France, England and America combined. . . . I felt I would be visiting my own genesis, unearthing the roots of what made me an African."¹¹⁹

Other would-be African leaders, whose rise to prominence was partially helped by the war, included the Nigerian Nnamdi Azikiwe, who remained closely associated with the anti-fascist struggle as a newspaper editor in the Gold Coast; the Sierra Leonian trade unionist, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, whose seditious article on the war resulted in his banishment from West Africa; and the Kenyan nationalist Jomo Kenyatta who, from London, published a short essay in the Labor Monthly entitled "Hands off Abyssinia."¹²⁰ At one time or another, Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Wallace-Johnson lived in England during the war, as did many of their Caribbean counterparts. It is therefore crucial to discuss below with some depth the London-based pan-African circle, for that was where the war had its most profound and lasting ideological

¹¹⁹Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Boston: Little Brown, 1994), p. 255.

¹²⁰Asante, Pan-African Protest pp. 16-17 and 107-14.

impact.

The Road to Manchester

As the intellectual center of English-speaking Africans and West Indians, London was where the first genuinely pan-African pro-Ethiopian lobby took roots. The International African Friends of Abyssinia, IAFA, was formed in London in August 1935 spurred by the impending fascist menace. The purpose of the group was to arouse British sympathy for Ethiopia and its territorial integrity by all means in its power. Although the IAFA was predominantly West Indian, its inclusion of African members attested to its nonsectarian character. Its officers included C.L.R. James, the chairman; Dr. Peter Milliard, originally from British Guyana but now a successful medical practitioner in Manchester, vice chairman; T. Albert Marryshaw, from Grenada, second vice chairman; Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, honorary secretary; and Mrs. Amy Ashwood Garvey, Garvey's second ex-wife, treasurer. Mohammed Said of Somaliland, Samuel Manning of Trinidad and George Padmore made up the rest of the executive committee. Makonnen was still in Denmark and would not join the group until a year later.¹²¹

The British pan-Africanists were in no better economic

¹²¹Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism p. 124.

shape than their black American counterparts in terms of their material assistance to the bereaved nation. As political shock troops, they nevertheless served a special purpose in countering pernicious anti-Ethiopian allegations by the fascists. In contrast to the latter's portrait of Haile Selassie as an anti-black racist, the West Indians for example used the king's arrival in London as an occasion to demonstrate their support and loyalty to the exiled Ethiopian government.

The initial plan was to receive Haile Selassie at the port in Plymouth under the auspices of the International African Friends of Abyssinia, but the venue was later moved to London in favor of the Waterloo Station. The IAFA showed up at the train station in full force, with bouquets of fresh flower to be presented to the king by two young girls. The crowd of officials and police did not permit an open access to Haile Selassie and it took an extra effort for the group to make its presence felt. "Finally the imperial delegation came out on to the platform, with Princess Tsehai in the lead," remembered Makonnen, a newcomer to the group. "We were there in strength, but really had to push our way forward. We were determined, however, not to be kept away by these imperialists who were pretending to be in sympathy, shedding their crocodile tears."¹²²

¹²²Makonnen, Pan-Africanism from Within pp. 115-16.

The IAFA championed the Ethiopian cause until its reconstitution in 1937 as the International African Service Bureau, IASB. Padmore replaced James as the head of the new circle, followed by Makonnen who played a crucial role as treasurer and a masterful fund-raiser. IASB's remaining officers included Kenyatta, assistant secretary; Wallace-Johnson, general secretary; and the Barbadian-born trade unionist, Chris Jones, organizing secretary. Until his departure for the United States in 1938, James served as the editor of IASB's International African Opinion, later to be replaced by William Harrison, an African-American scholar at the London School of Economics.¹²³

The IASB did not recruit any Ethiopian member into its inner circle, but it nonetheless cultivated close ties with the Ethiopian Legation in London headed by Hakim Warqneh and Emanuel Abraham. "I knew particularly well Ato Emanuel Abraham, the first secretary of the embassy there, and at a certain point he was round at my house, seeing me every day," Makonnen would reminisce. Emanuel furnished Makonnen with the latest news reports from Ethiopia, some of which were then published in the IASB's paper for wider circulation.¹²⁴

The IASB emerged as an important lobby group on African and West Indian affairs during the late thirties. Although

¹²³Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism pp. 124-26.

¹²⁴Makonnen, Pan-Africanism from within p. 120.

the group worked closely with white liberals like Nancy Cunard and Sylvia Pankhurst, among others, it viewed itself primarily as an organization of Africans for Africans. To that end, it vowed to support by all means possible "the uncoordinated struggles of Africans and peoples of African descent against oppression which they suffer in every country." It also expressed its determination to fight to the end "until economically, politically, and socially, the black man was everywhere as free as other men were."¹²⁵

Although the Ethiopian tragedy found itself more and more overshadowed by the crises in Spain and Central Europe during the late thirties, the IASB continued to appeal to European moral consciousness through a regular coverage of the war-front in its newsletter. The International African Opinion repeatedly condemned the West for its de facto recognition of the Northeast African nation as an Italian colony. Its editorials presented overblown accounts of Ethiopian battlefield victories so as to give the impression that, outside the cities and major garrison towns, the Ethiopian countryside was still under the control of the patriotic front.¹²⁶

¹²⁵Esedebe, Pan-Africanism pp. 124-25.

¹²⁶For example, see "The Ethiopian Question," International African Opinion 1, 1 (July 1938) pp. 10-11; "The New Invasion of Ethiopia," Ibid 1, 4 (October 1938), pp. 9-11; "The Final Betrayal of Ethiopia," Ibid 1, 5 (November 1939), pp. 12-13.

Besides the situation in Ethiopia, a major source of preoccupation among the London-based pan-Africanists in the same period was the growing social unrest in the Caribbean. During the 1937 and 1938 labor uprising that affected the entire Caribbean archipelago, the IASB together with Harold Moody's LCP endorsed the West Indian workers' demand for higher wages, better working and living conditions, and the release of the jailed strike leaders. It also used the occasion to call for West Indian self-government, for the unification of the various islands under a single federation, and for the establishment of a West Indian university. The IASB-LCP vision of a pan-Caribbean state would carry on through the early sixties resulting in the Jamaica-Trinidad federation. Unlike the short-lived federation experiment, the establishment of the University of the West Indies would prove more practical, remaining to-date a major regional institution with campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados.¹²⁷

Other joint lobbying actions by the IASB and LCP between the late thirties and the early forties included submission of a memorandum to the Colonial Office outlining the potential danger in the South African request to annex the three nearby British protectorates; repudiation of the Southern Rhodesian land apportionment act of 1941, by which

¹²⁷ Esedebe, Pan-Africanism pp. 130-34.

most of the agricultural lands were reserved for white settlers; petition to rescind the exclusion policy against black physicians by the British Colonial Medical Service; and demand for the universal implementation of the peoples' right for self-determination as stipulated in the Atlantic Charter.¹²⁸

As a pan-African organization, IASB's most remarkable achievement came in the mid 1940s. In response to an initiative by the IASB, in 1944 a number of African-oriented societies in England formed an umbrella organization, the Pan-African Federation. In memory of the tenth year of the Ethiopian trial, the IASB in conjunction with the PAF convened the fifth pan-African conference in Manchester in October 1945. With the exception of the American W. E. B. Du Bois who, at the age of 77, presided over the historic gathering, all other participants had African or Caribbean nationalities. In all, more than two hundred delegates consisting of farmers' representatives, students' leaders, intellectuals, trade unionists and professionals attended the four-day-long conference. On the Caribbean side, Padmore, Makonnen and Milliard did most of the organizational work. Peter Abrahams of South Africa, Wallace-Johnson, Kenyatta and Nkrumah--the latter had just returned from his studies in

¹²⁸Ibid pp. 128-30 and 136-53.

America--remained the major African participants.¹²⁹

Unlike the previous four pan-African gatherings whose political demands lay within the confines of self-government, the fifth pan-African congress insisted on total and complete independence for the colonies. Its deliberations dwelt on political issues such as the implementation of the Atlantic Charter and the establishment of democratic rule in Africa and the West Indies. Tied to these themes were resolutions on economic questions which, among others, called for land redistribution in the settler colonies, and for the abolition of forced labor and pass laws.¹³⁰ Educational, racial and social concerns were also raised. Of particular interest in conjunction with this last point was the presence of two female participants, Amy Ashwood Garvey and Alma La Badie of Jamaica, who spoke on the double oppression of women and children under colonialism.¹³¹

In a document titled "The Challenge to the Colonial Powers," the conference espoused the doctrine of nonviolence, but it also justified the resort to arms should the peaceful

¹²⁹Ibid pp. 130-48.

¹³⁰Proceedings of the Congress were first published by Padmore in 1947 and then reprinted in 1963 with introductory remarks by Du Bois, Azikiwe and Nkrumah. George Padmore, ed., History of the Pan-African Congress: Colonial and Colored Unity, a Program of Action (London: Hammersmith Bookshop Limited, 1963).

¹³¹Ibid pp. 52-53.

struggle fail. "The delegates to the Fifth Pan-African Congress believe in peace," the document stated. "Yet, if the Western world is still determined to rule mankind by force, then Africans, as the last resort, may have to appeal to force in the effort to achieve freedom, even if force destroys them and the world."¹³²

In another document, "Declaration to the Colonial Workers, Farmers and Intellectuals," the Congress expressed its unconditional demand for complete political independence, economic equality and social emancipation. "We say to the people of the colonies that they have to fight for these ends by all means at their disposal." The meeting further urged the colonial workers to "organize effectively" and reminded them of their formidable weapons: "the strike and the boycott." It likewise challenged "the intellectual and professional class" to awaken to its leadership role by forming trade unions and cooperatives, and by demanding the rights to assemble and demonstrate freely. "Today, there is only one road to effective action: the organization of the masses; and in that organization the educated colonials must join. Colonials and subject peoples of the world unite!"¹³³

At the close of the conference, mention was made of the need to forge a stronger racial alliance among Africans and

¹³²Ibid p. 5.

¹³³Ibid pp. 6-7.

peoples of African descent. "Fraternal greetings" were sent to the three black republics of Ethiopia, Liberia and Haiti. The Congress let it be known that it saw these nations "with jealous pride" and regarded them "as symbols of the realizations of the political hopes and aspirations of African peoples still under imperialist domination."¹³⁴ With the aid of T. R. Makonnen, the self-appointed Ethiopian representative, an additional resolution was drafted demanding the immediate British military withdrawal from Northeast Africa and the return of Ogaden and Eritrea to the Ethiopian "motherland."¹³⁵

From Manchester to Africa

In philosophical terms, the Fifth Pan-African Congress marked the coming of age of independent black thinking and political activism that was neither capitalistic nor communistic. As Padmore put it, in words evocative of the Afrocentric perspective, "Here at long last was a philosophy evolved by Negro thinkers which Africans and peoples of African descent could claim and use as their own."¹³⁶

Of all Africa-oriented conferences hitherto, the

¹³⁴Ibid p. 63.

¹³⁵Ibid pp. 44-45 and 63.

¹³⁶Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism p. 131.

Manchester gathering left deeper imprints on subsequent political developments and thus served as the direct link between the nascent pan-African nationalism of the mid-thirties and its full-grown variant of the fifties. By bringing together the leading pan-Africanists of the century, the Congress provided the ideological blueprint that became the launchpad of the African independence struggle. It redefined and articulated such Western concepts as democracy, self-determination and equality, making them ever more relevant to the colonial context. The conference lent moral justification for the overthrow of the colonial status quo by any means possible, but also reserved the resort to arms as only the last option.

The experience of Ghana or the Gold Coast in the 1950s best embodied the extent to which the Manchester meeting influenced African nationalists. Having returned to Ghana in the late 1940s, Nkrumah gained wide recognition first as a general secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention, an elitist political establishment, and then as the founder and leader of the mass-based Convention Peoples' Party, CPP. Inspired by the meeting in Manchester, the CPP drew a six-point program of action whose aims included the establishment of self-government through constitutional and democratic means, the implementation of trade unions, and the

facilitation of a West African federation.¹³⁷

The British attempt to silence the CPP by imprisoning its leaders, including Nkrumah, only served to further popularize the Party and what it stood for: "self-government now." In 1956, following a protracted negotiation between the CPP and the Colonial Office, Nkrumah was taken out of prison and made chief minister, and a year later Ghana became the first country in black Africa to gain independence. Nkrumah, however, remained cynical toward piecemeal decolonization, emphasizing instead the urgency for total liberation and immediate unification of the continent under one flag. Despite paying lip service to the philosophy of nonviolence, or "positive action," he turned his capital Accra into a Mecca for African freedom fighters and he himself later published a booklet on guerilla warfare.¹³⁸ Hoping to set an example for the continent, he pioneered the ill-fated Ghana-Guinea-Mali federation. The West African federation failed for the same reason its Caribbean counterpart failed: mainly the unwillingness by the bigger and wealthier states to share their resources with the poorer and smaller countries.

Reminiscent of the Manchester spirit, Nkrumah showed a genuine commitment to the call of racial unity among peoples

¹³⁷Nkrumah, Ghana p. 101.

¹³⁸Kwame Nkrumah, Handbook to the Revolutionary Warfare: A Guide to the Armed Phase of the African Revolution (New York: International Publishers, 1969).

of color globally. He invited Padmore and Makonnen to serve under his government, and also graciously accepted the desire by dozens of African-American pan-Africanists--including Du Bois and Maya Angelou--to settle in Accra. Ghana was the only African nation visited by Martin Luther King, Jr.,¹³⁹ and was also where Malcolm X was received most warmly in all his overseas travels. "I can only wish that every American black man could have shared my ears, my eyes and my emotion throughout the round of engagements which had been made for me in Ghana," was how Malcolm X described his reception in the West African capital.¹⁴⁰

If Ghana's independence in the late fifties on the one hand created a sense of optimistic euphoria among a generation of pan-African visionaries, events of the early sixties on the other hand implied defeat and disappointment. Between 1958 and 1963 a series of conferences were held in Accra and Addis Ababa on the theme of African unity. The pan-Africanists favored a singular African state through the immediate liquidation of national boundaries, while their opponents, mostly French-speaking, opted for a policy of close but informal cooperation among the independent states.

¹³⁹David Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), pp. 90-91.

¹⁴⁰Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 353.

During a meeting in Addis Ababa in May 1963, the two sides accepted the Ethiopian proposal which called for the formation of a supranational political institution, the Organization of African Unity.¹⁴¹ While the establishment of the OAU in the Ethiopian capital under the leadership of Haile Selassie impressed many observers as a practical and workable arrangement, for the Manchester radicals it meant having reached a dead-end on their idealistic road. Haile Selassie, the anti-fascist hero of the thirties, became in their view the very nemesis who dealt pan-Africanism its final death blow, while Ethiopia, the country of whose woes was born modern pan-African nationalism, represented its burial ground.¹⁴²

Rather symbolically, the year 1963 also marked the death of Du Bois the "father" of pan-Africanism, preceded by the demise of Padmore, another towering figure, four years earlier. The 1966 coup that toppled Nkrumah and forced him into exile in neighboring Guinea at last drew to a close the

¹⁴¹Vincent Bakpetu Thomson, Africa and Unity: The Evolution of Pan-Africanism (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), pp. 148-67.

¹⁴²The pan-Africanists abided by the Addis Ababa proposal because they felt diplomatically outmaneuvered by Haile Selassie and his revered international stature. The fact that Nkrumah and other younger radicals later supported the Eritrean secessionist struggle reveals that the pan-Africanists' held a deep resentment towards Ethiopia's leadership role in black Africa. See Peter Schwab's Haile Selassie: Ethiopia's Lion of Judah (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979), pp. 101-114.

chapter on pan-Africanism as a state ideology. After languishing in prison for sometime under the new military government, Makonnen, the only remaining Caribbean pan-Africanist in Ghana, left for Nairobi where he worked with the Kenyan Ministry of Tourism until his death in the early eighties.¹⁴³

¹⁴³"Ras Makonnen, True Pan-Africanist: An Obituary," Weekly Review (Nairobi: January 6, 1984). For a reprint of the article, see Kwesi Kwaa Prah's Beyond the Color Line: Pan-Africanist Disputations (Florida Hills: Vivlia, 1997), pp. 21-24.

Chapter III

The Africanization of Ethiopian National Consciousness

A phenomenon associated with the colonial experience in Africa during the late 19th and early 20th century was the rise of racial consciousness among the educated elites. Having for the most part spared themselves from foreign occupation, Ethiopians did not develop a similar pan-African identity until the mid-20th century. An age-long isolation from Africa and relative proximity to the Middle East have in fact prompted, albeit erroneously, the portrait of Ethiopia as a non-African polity. Given the unique Ethiopian experience, a step-by-step examination of the country's Africanization process is therefore in order.

Four phases can be outlined in the racialization process of Ethiopian national identity: the incipient or the encounter period, 1896-1935; the anti-European reaction period, 1935-1944; the Africanization period, 1944-1963; and the radicalization period, 1959-1974. These epochs are in turn associated with specific historical agents: official emissaries to America during the pre-war decades, wartime race activists in the thirties, Haile Selassie and his Africa-oriented policy in the forties and fifties, and the students and their militant ideas in the sixties.

The Incipient period: 1896-1935

The Adwa Aftermath

Ethiopia, then popularly known as Abyssinia, came into the fore of black consciousness during the closing of the nineteenth century. In March 1896 the Ethiopians dealt a decisive blow to the Italian colonial army at the battle of Adwa, a district in northern Ethiopia. Besides ensuring Ethiopia's independence for decades to come, the Adwan victory catapulted overnight the once obscure northeast African kingdom into world attention. For blacks the world over, the Adwan victory became a self-defining moment: a source of racial pride, a beacon of hope and a symbol of freedom.

Evident of this newly aroused interest in Northeast Africa was the visit to Ethiopia at the turn of the century by two black adventurers: Benito Sylvain and William Ellis. Sylvain was a Paris-based Haitian intellectual who, together with the Trinidadian-born barrister, Sylvester Williams, organized the first pan-African congress in London in the summer of 1900.¹ Sylvain visited Northeast Africa in 1897 and

¹Owen Mathurin, Henry Sylvester Williams and the Origin of the Pan-African Movement, 1869-1911 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976).

1903. During an audience with Menelik, Sylvain is said to have proposed the establishment of diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and Haiti, but the idea was received coldly by the emperor known for his pragmatic foreign policy.²

During his second mission to the highland nation Sylvain was accompanied by William Ellis, an African-American traveler. Ellis's 1903 trip to Northeast Africa was commercially driven, with a secondary motive of establishing an African-American colony. On his return to the United States, Ellis tried to arouse American business interest in Ethiopia by painting a fantastic picture of the country as a land rich in minerals and forestry. He reportedly presented to Andrew Carnegie a letter of business proposal, a document to which the wealthy financier did not apparently reply.³

On a more practical note, Ellis's trip aroused his countrymen's political curiosity in the far off nation and, in effect, paved the way for the launching of the first American diplomatic mission. Robert Skinner, the American official envoy, reached Addis Ababa in 1904, and his arrival marked the first chapter in the history of the U.S.-Ethiopian diplomatic link.⁴ Little is known about Ellis and his

²Chris Prouty, Empress Taytu and Menelik II of Ethiopia: 1883-1910 (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1986), pp. 202-03.

³Richard Pankhurst, "William H. Ellis," Ethiopia Observer 15, 2 (1972), pp. 89-121.

⁴Skinner later published the account of his trip to

dealings with Ethiopia afterwards, although his name was mentioned by the New York Times in connection with the news of Menelik's death years later.⁵

Arriving in Northeast Africa in the early 1900s was also Joseph Vitalien, popularly known to the Ethiopians as "Tikwur Hakim" or the black doctor. From the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, Vitalien was a Paris-trained physician and, one may presume, a close acquaintance of Sylvain. A man of various capacities, Vitalien served with the Ethio-French railway board; tutored the young Tefari Makonnen and his cousin Imru Haile Selassie, and helped found the Ras Makonnen Hospital in Harrar in 1903 and the Menelik II Hospital in Addis Ababa six years later. Vitalien is remembered as Menelik's trusted court physician during the monarch's final ailing years. According to Richard Pankhurst, the West Indian "was highly esteemed by the emperor, who in 1907 contemplated appointing him minister of health in his first cabinet, but was dissuaded by the Great Powers, who regarded the doctor with jealousy."⁶

Ethiopia, the first of its kind written by an American visitor. Robert Skinner, Abyssinia of Today (New York: Longmans, 1906).

⁵On December 17, 1913, the New York paper reported that Ellis had helped Menelik invest some of his money in a New York bank account. See Harris, Reaction to War in Ethiopia p. 3.

⁶Richard Pankhurst, An Introduction to the Medical History of Ethiopia (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1990), pp. 82-

If the years between the 1890s and the 1910s mark the rise of black interest in Ethiopia, the 1920s and 1930s likewise indicate the beginning of Ethiopian awareness of New World blacks. Since the appointment of Ras Tefari as crown regent in 1916, the Ethiopian government was intent on widening its diplomatic course abroad. Illustrative of this outward-oriented policy was the 1919 visit to the United States--the first of its kind-- by three Ethiopian officials: Heruy Wolde-Selassie, Dejach Nadew Abba-Wallo and Kentiba Gebru Desta. An encounter between the dignitaries and their New World racial cousins took place at the old Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, where the officials were met by a group of Harlemites led by the historian Dr. Willis Huggins. From the Waldorf the guests were taken to the Metropolitan Baptist Church where they were introduced to the larger black community. Heruy addressed the congregation through an interpreter and his message read in part:

On the part of the Ethiopian Empire we desire to express the satisfaction we have felt on hearing of the wonderful progress the Africans have made in this country. It gives us great confidence in the Government of the United States to know that through the independence given you by America, you have increased in numbers and developed in education and prosperity. We want you to remember us after we have returned to our native country. In order to help you do this we suggest that you turn to your Bible and in our memory, read to yourselves, from time to time, the first Chapter of the first Epistle of John. This is the first

thing read by our children after they have learned the alphabet, and is called the Alphabet of the Apostles. Please also tell this to such of your friends whom we did not have the opportunity to meet and kindly convey to them our farewell.⁷

Even if Heruy's flattering tribute to the U.S. government bemused some as naive, the Ethiopian trio seem to have left a favorable impression on Harlem in general. After the three African officials completed their mission and returned home, a letter was dispatched by Marcus Garvey to the Ethiopian government asking it to send representatives to the 1920 UNIA conference in New York. For reasons not clear, Garvey's message did not reach Ethiopia. The UNIA leader did not know of this, however. Later on in the thirties, as Garvey's attitude toward Ethiopia became tainted by events surrounding the war with Italy, he charged that Haile Selassie's Government was so snobbish as to have returned his letter of invitation unread.⁸

Although the circumstances under which Garvey's letter was returned unopened may not be fully known, it helps to note that Ethiopia's rising racial importance in the 1920s was a source of concern for the Italian government. Following the third international UNIA convention in 1922, the Italian vice consul in New York wrote to Rome drawing attention to

⁷Huggins and Jackson, An Introduction to African Civilizations pp. 87-88.

⁸Melaku Bayen, "Is Marcus Garvey Faithful to Himself?" Voice of Ethiopia January, 19, 1937.

Ethiopia's growing stature among black Harlemites. "The relationship of this movement (UNIA) with the Ethiopian empire is today purely sentimental," the report read. ". . . Nonetheless, in the event that Abyssinia should be confronted by an imaginary or real danger, it is certain all the moral influence of this movement would side with Abyssinia against the usurpers."⁹

In Rome, the Italian ministry of colonies inferred four points from the consular report:

a) The Ethiopic government participates in the movement; b) the word 'Ethiopia' is adopted as a synonym of the Homeland for the Black Man; c) Abyssinia invites the American Negroes to come and colonize her uncultivated land; d) there will be a declaration of solidarity with Abyssinia, should her territorial integrity and sovereignty be threatened.¹⁰

Contrary to what was claimed in the above summary, copies of which were sent to colonial officials in Asmara and Mogadishu,¹¹ Ethiopia took no part in the UNIA conference. Otherwise, the Italian intelligence was not only accurate but also foresaw the 1935-36 racial uproar in reaction to fascist bellicosity in Africa. From a historical point, the

⁹"Report by Dr. Paolo Alberto Rossi, Vice Consul of Italy, New York City," in Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers, vol. 9. Robert Hill, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 689.

¹⁰"Luigi Federzoni: Italian Ministry of Colonies to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," Ibid pp. 699-700.

¹¹"Ugo Niccoli to Colonial Governors at Asmara and Mogadishu," Ibid p. 698.

communique between New York and Rome not only reveals the extent of Italian colonial designs on Ethiopia, even prior to the consolidation of fascism, but also raises the possibility that Garvey's letter to Ethiopia may have been intercepted by Italian agents.

Hakim Warqneh and the Overseas Overture

The second encounter between Ethiopian officials and occidental blacks took place in 1927. That was the year in which Dr. Charles Martin, popularly known as Hakim Warqneh, traveled to the United States to sign a treaty with an American construction company on the Tsana Dam Project. The accounts about Warqneh's trip to the New World are controversial. Huggins wrote that Dr. Martin did not appear in public during his American mission, but all the same extended invitations for professional and skilled blacks to come and settle in Ethiopia.¹² According to T. R. Makonnen, the Ethiopian doctor refused to identify himself as black and rebuffed a lecture invitation by Howard University. He did encourage individuals with certain skills and education to move to Ethiopia, but the ones whose applications he accepted were fair-skinned blacks.¹³

¹²Huggins and Jackson, African Civilizations p. 88.

¹³Makonnen, Pan-Africanism from Within pp. 73-74.

Makonnen's version is contradicted by Roi Ottley, a Harlem journalist come historian. Ottley reported that Warqneh's visit was so popular that it resulted in the migration of "several hundred" Negroes to Ethiopia.¹⁴ Given his close acquaintance with Dr. Martin, Melaku Bayen is perhaps the most reliable source on the above controversy. Melaku, then a student in Ohio, credited his countryman for having made serious but unsuccessful attempts to reach out to blacks. According to Melaku, Warqneh came to the U.S. with 53 job offers, all of which were turned down as they did not pay well enough by American standards. The job offers were later taken up eagerly by Indians from the subcontinent.¹⁵ Melaku's version of the story becomes all the more convincing as one considers that Warqneh's U.S. visit took place during a post-war economic boom, a period in which few blacks saw the need to leave their country for a life so uncertain in Africa.

In a few years' time following Martin's visit, there was a drastic turn around in the black American attitude toward migration. In the thirties, unlike the economic boom of the decades preceding it, there were fewer job opportunities for blacks and whites alike. The great depression made a job prospect anywhere in the world

¹⁴Roi Ottley, New World A-Coming pp. 107-108.

¹⁵Melaku Bayen, The March of Black Men (New York: Voice of Ethiopia Press, 1939), p. 5.

irresistible, even in so remote a country as Ethiopia. Following Kentiba Gebru's second call on the United States in 1930, Northeast Africa with its indigenous form of Christianity and long recorded history evoked the image of the Promised Land in black nationalistic circles. Undeterred by the high cost of transportation and by the uncertainty of life in a new land, the more determined of this group left for a fresh start in Ethiopia. According to a report by Jerrold Robbins, a white American traveler, of the 150 or so U.S. citizens in Ethiopia in the early thirties two-thirds were black immigrants.¹⁶

The last documented contact between an Ethiopian government official and New World Africans prior to the war occurred in 1933. This time, Harlem's African guest of honor was none other than Haile Selassie's son-in-law, Ras Desta Damtew. The primary purpose for Desta's trip was to pay official visit to FDR's Government in exchange for the American deputation of H. Murray Jacoby to the 1930 imperial coronation in Addis Ababa. Like the other emissaries before him, Desta used the occasion to strengthen the Afro-Atlantic racial ties and met for that purpose with a group of notable race activists at a New York hotel. "During a two hour interview the Prince inquired of every phase of the life of

¹⁶Jerrord Robbins, "The American in Ethiopia," American Mercury 29, 113 (May 1933), pp. 63-69.

black folk in the United States," writes Huggins the leader of the group. At the end of the discussion the Ras placed a golden ring around Huggins' finger "as a mystic circle of friendship and bade him to keep interest in Ethiopia alive in the hearts of the American blacks."¹⁷

Ras Desta reiterated the settlement scheme that Gebru and Martin had promoted earlier. Because of Italy's ever increasing war bravado, and because of disparaging reports of widespread poverty and disease by the earlier immigrants, few, if any, pioneers left for Ethiopia in the aftermath of the prince's visit. Even so, Haile Selassie's son-in-law was remembered for the favorable impression he created both for himself and for his country. When the war with Italy broke out, Ras Desta, who died fighting for his country, became the best known Ethiopian martyr in black America. He was immortalized by George Schuyler's 1936 fiction serial, Ethiopian Stories, in which the central character, an anti-fascist patriot, was named after him.¹⁸

Melaku Bayen: A Pan-African Visionary and Wartime Activist

Present with Kentiba Gebru and Ras Desta during their

¹⁷Huggins and Jackson, African Civilizations pp. 88-89.

¹⁸George S. Schuyler, Ethiopian Stories, Robert Hill, ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994).

1930 and 1933 missions to America was the aforementioned Melaku Bayen, then a medical student at Howard University. The meeting with Dr. Martin in 1927 had already steered Melaku toward a unique interest in pan-Africanism. "As early as 1927, Dr. Martin said to me the greatest service you could render to your country would be to influence thousands of black peoples in the U.S.A. and the West Indies and let them come and help us develop Ethiopia."¹⁹

Inspired by Warqneh's piece of advice, in 1929 Melaku entered Howard University as a student of medicine. There, the Ethiopian youth was introduced to radical race politics and, at a more personal level, to his future wife Dorothy. "It was this idea," he wrote alluding to his belief in racial solidarity, "that helped me to break my engagement to the daughter of our Minister of Foreign Affairs and to be married to an American girl of the Black Race in 1931." Besides his subsequent prominence in the anti-fascist and pro-Ethiopian campaign, Melaku would be instrumental in the sending of several black pioneers to Ethiopia, among them Hubert Julian and John Robinson, aviators; Cyril Price, educator; and John West, public health expert.²⁰

Melaku Emmanuel Bayen was born in the province of Wollo at the turn of the century. A close cousin to Ras Tefari, he

¹⁹Melaku, March of Black Men p. 6.

²⁰Ibid.

grew up in the imperial courts of Harrar and Addis Ababa.²¹ Despite his ambition to serve in the military, in 1921 Melaku was handpicked by Tefari and sent to the United States by way of India for modern education.²² Accompanying him both to India and the U.S. were two other students: Workou Gobena and Bashawarad Habetewold. Of the three, Melaku was the one apt enough to show interest in graduate school. He received his bachelor's degree in chemistry from Muskingum College in Ohio in 1928 and, after one year of graduate work at Ohio State University in Columbus, was admitted by Howard University Medical School in Washington D.C.²³

Graduating in June 1935 as an MD, Melaku returned to Addis Ababa with his American wife and their three-year-old son as an intern at the American mission hospital. It was not long before his internship was interrupted, however, by Italy's act of aggression. One of a handful of physicians in the entire country, he served as a medical volunteer both at the eastern and northern fronts, and later accompanied the emperor and his family as they left for exile in England.²⁴

Then came Melaku's appointment as an emissary to black America. What initiated that appointment was, according to

²¹Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race p. 168.

²²Melaku, March of Black Men p. 3.

²³Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 168-70.

²⁴Ibid pp. 171-72.

William Scott, the African-Americans' desire for an authentic liaison through whom aid could be channeled directly to Ethiopia. The idea was suggested to Haile Selassie by three black American activists in a meeting with him at his residence in Bath in the summer of 1936. The delegates informed the emperor of the pro-Ethiopian fund-raising frenzy in America led by individuals of dubious credentials. They suggested that such pro-Ethiopian orchestrations be coordinated by a more respectable figure, thus the decision by Tefari to send his own cousin to America.²⁵

Enthusiastic with the de facto ambassadorial mission, the Ethiopian doctor disembarked in New York in September 1936. "While in Europe I was almost demoralized," he later admitted in an autobiographical sketch. "I was glad to leave England because, excepting Hon. Sylvia Pankhurst, Prof. p. H. Stanley Jevons, Hon. Hazle Napier and a few others, . . . I never heard of anyone else among the whites who had courage enough to say we could and should save our country."²⁶

In the absence of a central leadership figure, much of the pro-Ethiopian fanfare in America had been in rapid decline prior to Melaku's arrival. Melaku's presence in Harlem helped rekindle the patriotic racial fervor among blacks. Organizational improvement under Melaku's leadership

²⁵Ibid p. 167.

²⁶Melaku, March of Black Men p. 7.

included the centralization of the fund raising drive through the issuance of the "Save Ethiopia" stamps. Another innovative source of revenue was the publication of the weekly newsletter, the Voice of Ethiopia, which, in its heyday, sold thousands of copies, each selling for three cents in New York and five cents outside.

Besides being a source of revenue, the VOE doubled as a propaganda mouthpiece and as an educational forum. The propaganda articles, most of them on the war, were meant to boost morale by giving exaggerated accounts of Ethiopian battlefield victories. More original in style was the educational section. The paper, for example, carried Amharic lessons in a weekly sequel, and also ran a serial on Ethiopian history by William Steen and Prof. Leo Hansberry. There was also the "Ask Me" column in which Melaku discussed or answered selected questions on Ethiopian politics.

Mrs. Dorothy Bayen, Melaku's wife, prepared the Letter to the Editor column: "Ethiopian Friends Far and Near." A casual glimpse of this section shows a wide readership of the paper among the supporters of Ethiopia in the Western hemisphere. Some of the correspondences came from as far as Central America and the Caribbean. For example, a letter from the Republic of Panama was accompanied by a contribution of eleven dollars toward the Ethiopian cause. "Our help may be meager, but our wage is a mere pittance. It does not afford

us to do the big things that we would like to do," the letter added.²⁷

Other than the weekly Amharic lesson and the "Ask Me" column, Melaku's literary contribution to the paper was minimal. Nonetheless, there was one major article by Melaku worth mentioning, namely, the two-part essay he wrote in response to Garvey's attack on Haile Selassie. In a series of essays in Black Man, a monthly pamphlet, Garvey had accused Haile Selassie, and by extension the Ethiopian society, of racial arrogance toward Western blacks. Ethiopians regarded themselves as dark-skinned Caucasians and looked down upon blacks as their inferiors, the UNIA founder had charged.²⁸ Garvey's allegations were reinforced by individuals like Willis Huggins. Huggins had started out as a pro-Ethiopian activist before and during the war. But when rumors spread about his misuse of the Ethiopian support fund, Huggins like Garvey resorted to character assassination of the Ethiopian leadership.²⁹

Melaku's essay sought to redeem Ethiopia's image among blacks. Foremost, it hoped to refute the aspersion cast by Garvey and Huggins, in which class status and skin color in

²⁷"Friends of Ethiopia Far and Near," VOE August 21, 1937.

²⁸"Bond without Blood," see chap.2.

²⁹See chap.1.

Ethiopia were intimately linked. The doctor drew attention to his own olive complexion as proof that merit and not physical appearance mattered in Ethiopia. "May I also say that a large number of the royal family have been very dark in color," he stated. "His late Majesty, Menelik II, was of a very dark complexion. There is no color question in Ethiopia."³⁰

Melaku attributed Black Man's negative commentaries on Ethiopia to Marcus Garvey's megalomaniac tendencies. "His thwarted enthusiasm for public glory has degenerated to a passion of self-destruction," the royal activist rebutted. Garvey's anti-Ethiopian propaganda was partly influenced by his Catholic faith and partly by Italian bribe. "In fact, he has sold his birth right for a mass of pottage."³¹

Regarding the accusation of Ethiopia as the last bastion of slavery, Melaku's essay pointed out the recent emancipation of "two million serfs" and the legislation of a law which made slave trafficking a crime punishable by death.³² Contrary to Garvey's portrait of Haile Selassie as backward and lethargic, the article explained the king's embrace of modern reforms prior to the Italian intrusion. He introduced the first constitution in the country's history;

³⁰Melaku, "Is Marcus Garvey Faithful to Himself?" VOE January, 19, 1937.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

sent students to Europe and America for further studies; and more than twice invited skilled blacks to settle in Ethiopia. "Had we been allowed to progress uninterrupted for five or ten years more, certainly we would have developed our country to such an extent no other country would have found it convenient to intrude upon us. This is the fact which hastened Fascist aggression upon Ethiopia."³³

Needless to say, Melaku's description of the Ethiopian society and government was drawn from his firsthand knowledge of the country. His rejection of the presence of social stratification in Ethiopia based on skin color was true insofar as the Kushitic and Semitic-speaking Ethiopians were concerned. Besides sharing similar physical characteristics--dark-brown to light-brown in complexion--the two groups practiced Islam or Christianity, and by far constituted the majority of the Ethiopian population.

What Melaku failed to mention was the presence of minority groups in Ethiopia whose experience paralleled that of diasporan blacks. Both the Kushitic and Semitic-speakers looked down upon the animist and darker-skinned Nilotic/Omotic minorities like the Shangella, most of whom resided in pockets of isolation along the southern and southwestern borderlands. Whereas Muslim and Christian

³³Melaku, "Is Marcus Garvey Faithful to Himself?" (second instalment) VOE February 3, 1937.

Ethiopians were tied together through identical yet competing historical and religious identities, sharp ethnic and cultural markers were drawn between them and the peripheral groups. Moreover, as non-Muslims and non-Christians, the latter lay most exposed to slave raiders and thus bore the stigma of slavery even long after its abolition.

However, in fairness to Melaku's argument, it should be born in mind that the source of discrimination in Ethiopia, unlike in Europe or North America, was not race but culture and ethnicity. Ethiopia was not unique in this, moreover. The Pygmies of Central Africa and the Khoisans of Southern Africa, for instance, were discriminated against by their more powerful Bantu-speaking neighbors. In the United States and the Caribbean, likewise, light skinned mulattoes tended to discourage marriage to dark-skinned Africans, and the level of European blood in one's vein often dictated the height of one's social position in society. Lest he gave more ammunition to his detractors, Melaku did not present the Ethiopian experience in such broader global contexts. All the same the down-to-earth tone of his writing helped reassure color-conscious blacks of Ethiopia's identification with Africa and in so doing rendered Garvey's attacks less potent if irrelevant.

The Ethiopian World Federation

In obeisance to the race-first pan-African ideology, in August 1937 Melaku and his supporters broke with the communist-led United Aid for Ethiopia and formed the Ethiopian World Federation Incorporated. As the name "Federation" implied, the EWF held as its objective the unity of all blacks and black organizations under the Ethiopian banner. "I do not want it thought that Ethiopia will not and should not accept aid from all races and all peoples, But I do believe that the major part must be done by us, and we must not depend on any other group," read in part Melaku's inaugural speech. "We must remember that our battles will not be won by hatred for anyone, but by self-sacrifice, love for all mankind and harmony within our ranks."³⁴

Although Melaku avoided the mention of Garvey's name in public, the EWF saw itself as an ideological heir to the now defunct UNIA. Its racialism, militant anti-colonialism and commitment to repatriation were all echoes from the past. Many of Melaku's associates were ex-functionaries of Garvey. Like the UNIA, moreover, the EWF introduced or ended its weekly meetings with what became known as the Ethiopian National Anthem, "Ethiopia thou Land of our Fathers."³⁵

³⁴"World Federation for Ethiopia is Formed," VOE August 21, 1937.

³⁵The song was composed by Arnold Ford, UNIA's music director, in the 1910s. A convert to Judaism, Rabbi Ford

Melaku hoped the EWF would be to his generation what UNIA had been to blacks a generation earlier. "We are here to make a new Ethiopia in the Western world and to join hands with ancient Ethiopia," he told supporters. "We are out for a membership of two million. It is not impossible, for the same has been done for less worthy causes than this," he continued alluding to Garvey. "Other people have done it, and we are going to do the same. We firmly believe that this will be the most outstanding black organization in the world."³⁶

The EWF held regular weekly meetings on Friday evenings at 36-38 West 135th Street. According to VOE's own reports, the several hundred seats of the auditorium were often filled to capacity on these meetings, with many more standing. Appearances of well known public figures as guest speakers served as a magnet to members new and old alike. During the EWF's first meeting On August 13, for example, the renowned race historian, J. A. Rogers, was one of several invited speakers. On the September third gathering, likewise, the podium was taken by the noted bibliophile on black history, Dr. Arthur Schomburg. The collector of books and manuscripts advised his audience to keep up the fight for Ethiopia and not to be discouraged by Italy's temporary victory. "It is

migrated to Ethiopia in the early 1930s. See "Bond without Blood," ch. 2.

³⁶"Musical Concert, a Success: Mrs. Eudora Paris to be Congratulated," VOE October 9, 1937.

our duty," Schomburg said, "to hold the hand of Dr. Bayen in the work for Ethiopia, just as the hand of Mosses was held up on the mountain top."³⁷

Another factor for the quick growth of the new organization was the conspicuous presence of women in its ranks. Mrs. Dorothy Bayen's involvement with the Voe seems to have strengthened the EWF's image among women as can be judged by a good number of female contributors to her "Friends of Ethiopia" column. Aida Bastian and Eudora Paris, both of them ex-immigrants to Ethiopia and now frequent speakers on EWF forums, similarly helped attract a large female turnout.³⁸

During the next couple of years, Melaku's travels and public appearances in various parts of America were associated with the promotion of the new organization. Although the EWF never rose to be a mass movement as its founder had envisaged, it was popular enough to have chapters formed in several U.S. cities and in parts of the Caribbean. In addition, it played an unfrivolous role in the "free Ethiopia" campaign. Only a few weeks into its being, for

³⁷"Ethiopian World Federation Meets," VOE September 4, 1937.

³⁸The Friday meetings of September 3 and September 17, 1937, were chaired by women: Clara Selman and Eudora Paris respectively. See "Ethiopian World Federation Meets," VOE September 4, 1937; and "Ethiopian World Federation Unveils Charter," VOE September 18, 1937.

instance, it sent a petition of five thousand signatures to the League of Nations demanding that Italy's conquest of Ethiopia be denied any form of legal recognition by the world community.³⁹

While the late thirties on the one hand marked the most productive years in Melaku's pan-African activism, the same period on the other hand coincided with the gradual decline of his health. The death of relatives and close friends during the war must have exacted a heavy emotional toll on Melaku when coupled with chronic homesickness and a sense of cultural alienation. In fall 1937 he was joined by an Ethiopian couple, Lij Araya Abebe and his wife Assaguedetch, also a close relative of the emperor, and possibly the visit was meant to help Melaku cope with his wartime distress.⁴⁰

In his 1939 booklet, March of Black Men, Melaku declared, rather prophetically: "It is now plain to the world that Ethiopia shall not suffer very much longer. We will not only drive every Italian out of our country, we will also drive them out of every other part of Africa in the near future." "The work of the Ethiopian World Federation," he added, "will continue and will not be stopped even when His

³⁹"Protest to League," VOE August 28, 1937.

⁴⁰"Huge Crowd at St. Mark's Church Welcomes Lij Araya Abebe and his Wife," VOE October 9, 1937.

Majesty makes his triumphal entry to Addis Ababa."⁴¹ In the same year he wrote these lines, the Ethiopian activist was hospitalized due to complications arising from overwork and a strenuous lifestyle. Convalescence was followed by a second hospitalization leading to an untimely death on May 4, 1940, almost exactly a year before the liberation of Ethiopia.⁴²

Melaku was succeeded by Araya Abebe as the president of the fledgling organization. Araya, best remembered for a failed marital engagement to a Japanese princess some ten years earlier, possessed neither Melaku's dedication nor his remarkable leadership skill. In 1941 VOE ran its last weekly serial. This was followed by Araya's apparent return to Ethiopia, for there was no more mention of him in connection with the EWF.⁴³

Although claiming to be represented in several cities throughout North America and the West Indies, from the start the EWF had been a decentralized political movement. It did not develop a coherent organizational structure and was only held together by a shared pan-African ideology and the commitment to the Ethiopian cause. Devoid of a central leadership figure, in the aftermath of Melaku's death the various groups of the Federation disbanded. Only in larger

⁴¹Melaku, March of Black Men p. 9.

⁴²Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race p. 177.

⁴³Robert Hill, The FBI's Racon pp. 194-95 and 216-17.

cities such as New York and Chicago did some branches continue to function, albeit with reduced membership. The Ethiopian government's allocation of some land for EWF's settlement scheme in the mid-fifties somewhat revived the popularity of the movement but with a distorted effect. Intimately linked with a Jamaican-based messianic cause, the Federation had by then lost its secular appeal and the name EWF was henceforth incorporated by a Rastafarian sect of the same name. In mainstream black America, the name Melaku was shoved into an obscure corner of history but only to be venerated by the Rastafarians as a major prophetic figure of the century next to Bob Marley and Marcus Garvey.

A difficulty in assessing Melaku's significance to Ethiopian history lies in the fact that his political activism encompassed a short life span. Even then, the spatial extent of his activity was confined to the New World with only a marginal relevance to Ethiopian intellectual history. In his political profile, moreover, Melaku had more in common with West African and West Indian nationalists than with the well-known Ethiopian wartime patriots. His matriculation at Howard University and his embrace of black nationalism situated him in the same camp with such pan-Africanists as Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore, both of them alumni of black institutions. Despite personal differences, Melaku also had much in common with the renowned back-to-

Africa advocate, the Jamaican Marcus Garvey. Reminiscent of Garvey's UNIA and his widely-read newspaper, the Negro World, Melaku established the Ethiopian World Federation and the Voice of Ethiopia, through which he agitated for racial unity and African freedom.

Sylvia Pankhurst: A Pan-African Catalyst

As mentioned earlier, Melaku had known Sylvia Pankhurst, editor of the New Times and Ethiopian News, since his days in England in the summer of 1936. His correspondences with her from the United States, though intermittent, seemed warm and genuine. He regarded Sylvia's weekly newspaper as complementary to his own Voice of Ethiopia and often suggested that more efforts be made to increase the paper's circulation in America.⁴⁴ Sylvia reciprocated this feeling of cordiality and, on at least one occasion, published in her NTEN a short article about Melaku's activities in the U.S.⁴⁵

From 1938 on, however, the communication between the two grew less frequent and more lukewarm. In one letter Sylvia complained about one of Melaku's associates who owed

⁴⁴Richard Pankhurst, "From My Mother's Archives," Addis Tribune November 5, 1999.

⁴⁵"Baptists of America to Aid Ethiopia," NTEN July 24, 1937.

her money for the sales of her newspapers. Melaku apologized for the incident and promised to look into the matter.⁴⁶ Another factor that might have dampened the relationship was Melaku's establishment of the Ethiopian World Federation, a black nationalist organization to which Sylvia as a white activist did not feel welcomed. As a socialist-feminist radical, Sylvia must have found any brand of nationalism too sectarian, hence the antithesis to her universalist philosophy. This explains why Sylvia paid only a token attention to Melaku's untimely death at the age of thirty-nine. Appearing in the NTEN three weeks after the fact, Sylvia's obituary on Melaku was too brief and even then made no mention of his involvement in the politics of racial nationalism.⁴⁷

Ideological differences aside, Sylvia and Melaku traversed similar paths as wartime propagandists and shared much in common in the way they affected post-war Ethiopian racial consciousness. Besides campaigning for the franchise of women, a cause with which she was intimately associated, Sylvia spoke against fascism, Nazism, colonialism and racism. Class and gender awareness at an early age shaped the suffragette's spirit of combativeness against oppression in

⁴⁶Richard Pankhurst, "From My Mother's Archives," Addis Tribune November 19, 1999.

⁴⁷"Dr. Melaku Bayen," NTEN June 1, 1940.

general. She was first initiated into the world of radical politics through her father, a respected lawyer and advocate of the working class. Similarly, she drew her feminist inspiration from her mother Emmeline and older sister Christabel, both of them well known national figures in the women's movement.⁴⁸

But even by her family's standard, Sylvia was an anomaly. While Emmeline and Christabel called for a limited extension of political rights to women based on wealth and class status, Sylvia fought for universal adult suffrage.⁴⁹ Even more unusual for someone of her generation, she rejected social Darwinism and its ascription of the theory of racial hierarchy. In 1912, while on a speaking tour of North America to advance the cause of women, Sylvia spoke at minority colleges in the south, undaunted by the media's negative coverage of her action. Likewise, as the editor of the Workers Dreadnought, the leading feminist not only maintained close contacts with black writers like Claude McKay but also published articles condemning white supremacy rule in South Africa.⁵⁰

Given her unconventional past, Sylvia constituted a

⁴⁸Barbara Castle, Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst (New York: Penguin, 1987), cf ch. 1.

⁴⁹Ibid p. 76, pp. 113-14 and 129-31.

⁵⁰Mary Davis, Sylvia Pankhurst: A Life in Radical Politics (London: Pluto Press, 1999), pp. 94 and 104-6.

tailor-made candidate for a leadership role in the anti-fascist struggle. When Mussolini's army invaded Ethiopia in the fall of 1935, the suffragette was among the first in Britain to condemn the war in a series of articles. "Is the conscience of Europe dead? Is there no honest thinking left in Britain?" she wrote in October, in utter disgust of her country's acquiescence to Rome.⁵¹

Initially, Sylvia did not see the aggression as a racial incident. Her anti-war protest was in fact more due to her opposition to fascism than due to her love for Ethiopia. Since Mussolini's grasp of power in the early twenties, she had condemned fascism and its glorification of war as a danger to peace and democracy, a setback to the revolutionary spirit of the time including the women's progress. Her hatred for fascism was also personal. Through her long-time companion, Silvio Corio, an exiled Italian anarcho-socialist, Sylvia knew intimately Italy's leftist opposition figures, many of whom were either jailed or assassinated by Mussolini's hit squad. As a consequence, Sylvia abandoned her pacifist conviction and argued that fascism, and later Nazism, was an evil system that had to be crushed by all

⁵¹Richard Pankhurst, "Sylvia and New Times and Ethiopian News," in Sylvia Pankhurst: From Artist to Anti-Fascist, Ian Bullock and Richard Pankhurst, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 151.

means possible.⁵²

Following her introduction to Haile Selassie in the summer of 1936, the activist's position changed almost overnight from that of anti-fascist to that of pro-Ethiopian. The transition has not been explained fully by her biographers, although a platonic love attachment to the emperor has been insinuated by one writer.⁵³ Whatever the reason for her transformation, Sylvia embarked on her new political course with the same type of tenacity she had shown to the women's movement earlier. She campaigned for the liberation of Ethiopia, lobbied afterwards for the reunification of Eritrea with Ethiopia, and in the mid-fifties joined the struggle for African independence from her new home in Addis Ababa.

As had been the case with her previous political engagements, Sylvia maintained a multi-faceted approach to the Italo-Ethiopian war and her publications reflected that. The NTEN, which began printing on May 9, 1936, was both internationalist and pan-Africanist on the one hand, and gender and class conscious on the other. First and foremost, the attack on Ethiopia was seen as creating an explosive racial powder keg in Africa, and the NTEN regularly reported

⁵²Pankhurst, Sylvia pp. 149 and 153; Davis, Sylvia pp. 107-8.

⁵³Patricia W. Romero, Sylvia: Portrait of a Radical (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 226-88 in passim.

the anti-European anger that the war sparked among blacks. "The Italian aggression," observed one of Sylvia's contributors, "has, in my opinion, very seriously hampered the relationship between black and white throughout all Africa, and has probably done more to encourage pan-African and anti-white sentiment than any event in history."⁵⁴

Second, the Ethiopian tragedy was presented as part of the international crisis sweeping across Europe and Asia. In several issues of NTEN, Ethiopia, Spain and China appeared side by side as victims of imperial aggression, and the plight of the masses in those countries was often compared with the plight of those Italians who were either jailed, exiled or murdered by Mussolini. Third, as colonial subjects, the colored masses of Asia had much in common with Africans in their opposition to the war, and in several reports the NTEN captured the anti-imperial emotional bonds that tied the two peoples together.⁵⁵

Finally, the paper's unique feature was its gender dimension. There were regular references to the role of women in the pro-Ethiopian campaign,⁵⁶ as well as essays

⁵⁴F. S. Livie-Noble, "Italian Aggression in Abyssinia: Some Effects on Africa," NTEN May 30, 1936.

⁵⁵"Arab and Negro Conference in Paris," NTEN May 30, 1936; "India and Ethiopia," NTEN July 25, 1936; "Well-Done Muslims: A Snap to Mussolini," NTEN July 1, 1937.

⁵⁶For instance, see "Resolutions Passed by the Executive Committee of the Women's International League," NTEN May 23,

highlighting the role of Ethiopian female patriots in the underground resistance.⁵⁷ Attention was given similarly to the fate of colonial women as victims of double oppression, as in the case of the "870" Libyan women reportedly shipped to Ethiopia as high-class prostitutes.⁵⁸

In addition to presenting a kaleidoscopic picture of the war, Sylvia's weekly dealt with larger Afrocentric themes that were of special interest to its readers. It, for instance, reported the establishment of a commission of African education during the Seventh World Conference of the New Education Fellowship at Cheltenham. The paper quoted one of the African members of the commission as having argued that: "History books in Africa ought to be written by Africans and ought to aim at developing the 'national ego' of the African instead of dwelling on inter-tribal wars. Ancestor worship should be used as the basis for Christian teaching."⁵⁹

Given such pro-African and anti-colonial stances, the NTEN remained the most widely-circulated pan-African paper of its time, selling as many as forty thousand copies weekly at

1936.

⁵⁷Hazel Napier, "Brave Ethiopian Women," NTEN September 12, 1936.

⁵⁸"Women and Fascism," NTEN June 27, 1936.

⁵⁹"African Education," NTEN September 26, 1936.

its height. In west Africa and the West Indies particularly, the paper enjoyed popular readership among the politically conscious literati, and its essays were often reprinted in the local press for mass consumption.⁶⁰ The age-long colonial divide thus became for the first time more abstract than real. However geographically dispersed, Africans could now read, write and react to the same global issue that affected them as a people. Illustrative of this growing collective consciousness was a letter to Sylvia by a West African student in England who wrote that "the young people of African descent feel that Italy has invaded our fatherland," and added that "if it were not for your paper the young Africans would not know what is happening in Africa today, as the whole of the press in Europe has no room to publish the Ethiopian case."⁶¹

Naturally, colonial officials were the first to feel perturbed by NTEN's belligerent tone and its wide circulation across Africa. In Sierra Leone, where Sylvia's weekly was linked with the Youth League's anti-colonial militancy, contents of the paper were deemed seditious enough to warrant a ban under the "undesirable literature bill." To the officials' chagrin, the proscription only served to antagonize further the colonial administration. Together with

⁶⁰Davis, Sylvia p. 109.

⁶¹Pankhurst, Sylvia p. 158.

Harold Moody's LCP and other supporters, Sylvia fought the ban tooth-and-nail and succeeded in exposing the arbitrariness of the unjust ordinance. Her letters of protestation to Malcolm Macdonald, the Secretary of State, unnerved many a colonial official in London and Freetown; and, for months afterwards, the NTEN remained "a subject of embarrassing confrontation" between Sylvia and the Colonial Office.⁶²

Sylvia and Wargneh

Ethiopia was understandably where Sylvia's paper enjoyed the least wartime circulation, in part because it had to be smuggled in through Djibouti or Sudan, and in part because only a small number of Ethiopians were literate in English. Effort was made to make the paper available in Amharic. But by the few Amharic copies available today, the translation attempt seems to have been either a short-lived experiment or was done on rare occasions.

On the other hand, Ethiopians in exile knew about the paper and some even corresponded with Sylvia. One of her regular contacts was a certain Hiwot Hidaru, a refugee in Khartoum, who became her reliable informant on the underground resistance. The connection began in 1938 when,

⁶²Asante, Pan-African Protest pp. 192-93.

after reading about Sylvia's activities in London, Hiwot wrote a letter beseeching the suffragette's intercession in the release of his cousin from an internment camp in Kenya. Sylvia used her contacts and had the cousin freed, and Hiwot volunteered to serve as her news correspondent in return.⁶³

Of particular significance in all Sylvia's Ethiopian acquaintances and friends was Dr. Charles C. Martin, or Hakim Warqneh as he was popularly known among his compatriots. As discussed in an earlier section, it was in response to Warqneh's advice and mentorship that Melaku attributed his subsequent immersion in racial politics. Warqneh's own association with Western blacks was by no means extensive, but nor was it totally nonexistent. His large household in pre-war Ethiopia included the black American Ada Bastian, a nanny to his four children. While heading the Ethiopian legation in London, he also employed the Jamaican Una Marson as consular secretary. Overall, however, class and age differences seem to have prevented Warqneh from cultivating close personal ties with the young pan-Africanists in London, most of them recent immigrants. His Victorian upbringing in a British family may have also estranged him culturally from the group. He was after all British by taste and Ethiopian only by sentiment.⁶⁴

⁶³Romero, Portrait of a Radical p. 244.

⁶⁴Emmanuel Abraham, Reminiscences of My Life (Oslo: Lunde

But on the other hand, beneath the facade of an Englishman was Warqneh's pan-African instinct, as can be seen by his embrace of Ethiopian citizenship as an adult, or by his effort to recruit black volunteers for settlement in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, it was not until the outbreak of the war that the doctor grew out of his political reclusion and began to gravitate openly toward Sylvia and the anti-fascist cause. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia instilled in him a sense of patriotism which, when combined with his overall anti-colonial nationalism, made him one of the first internationally-minded Ethiopian intellectuals.

Of all the overseas-educated Ethiopians, Warqneh's life history stands out. His special circumstances go back to the 1868 Makdala Expedition, the year in which one of the Napier's officers found the three-year-old waif and decided to adopt him. Warqneh was brought up in Simla, India, where the officer was stationed, and later sent to Edinburgh to train in tropical medicine. The anglicized Martin served as a health officer in Burma, India and on-and-off in Menelik's Ethiopia. From 1919 on he found permanent employment in Tefari's Government, first as a medical personnel in Addis Ababa, then as a provincial governor, and then as a diplomat in London during the war years.⁶⁵

Forlag, 1995), pp. 30-35.

⁶⁵Pankhurst, Medical History of Ethiopia pp. 179-81.

Given Warqneh's intimacy with the Western culture, Tefari could not have made a more sound choice for the diplomatic post abroad. But Warqneh was also too stubborn to accept orders, and the emperor would find out his appointee was more of an independent actor than a supplicant courtier. The fact that Warqneh was adept in raising funds but poor in book-keeping only added to the friction, even though the money collected was used to help the many refugees whom Warqneh had been supporting at his own expense. Only the closing of the legation by the British government in 1938, and with that the termination of Martin's diplomatic status, would end the rivalry between the two, perhaps to the relief of both parties.⁶⁶

Personal differences did not affect Warqneh's role as a government mouthpiece. At a great personal sacrifice, the doctor made sure the legation stayed open and functional even as it was stripped of official recognition by the British government. Already in his early seventies, he carried out his diplomatic tasks diligently and was respected by white and black supporters alike. The IAFA activists, for example, looked up to him as a paternal figure easy to work with. "But more valuable was the fact that we were welcomed and supported in every way by the Ethiopian Embassy in London," the Trinidadian C. L. R. James remembered him. As the IAFA

⁶⁶Romero, Portrait of a Radical pp. 223-25.

president, James used to visit the legation frequently, some times twice a day, and Warqneh was always there to receive him in person.⁶⁷

Not only did Warqneh facilitate Sylvia's introduction to Haile Selassie but also remained her lifeline for news on Ethiopia. He himself wrote regularly for NTEN and in so doing gave the paper's pro-African image more credibility. His earlier essays generally dealt with the issue of international peace and justice, or criticized the League of Nations for its failure to act, or implored the public to continue its support for Ethiopia. Gradually, his writings became more militant and color-conscious, especially after financial circumstances and ill health forced him to sell his house in England and relocate to India, the country of his youth. The fact that Warqneh had been personally affected by the war--his two sons were among the thousands of Ethiopians massacred by Graziani's men in February 1937--may have contributed to the more aggressive tone of his subsequent writings.

One of his last essays from England discussed the European apathy toward "the poor old distant colored victims: the Chinese and Ethiopians."⁶⁸ In another article he wrote

⁶⁷C. L. R. James in the Sunday Mirror April 24, 1966.

⁶⁸Warqneh Martin, "The Future of Civilization: The Poor Old Coloured Victims," NTEN April 20, 1940.

from India, he mourned the lack of cooperation between Asians and Africans in the fight against "imperialism." Like Sylvia, Warqneh had been convinced by recent events that pacifism in the face of global evil encouraged more flagrant violations of international law. Out of this rose his opposition to pacifism and Gandhism, a "be slaughtered philosophy," as he dubbed it.

"This idealistic teaching may suit the irresponsible hermits who have nothing to gain or lose in this world," Warqneh wrote of nonviolence. "But from my own experience I have come to learn in this practical and realistic world of ours the policy of appeasement and weak submission to implacable violence is like courting pestilence, and is bound to lead to disaster in the end." The doctor concluded his essay with a strong denunciation of Satyagraha: "I therefore . . . beg the misguided enthusiasts immediately to put a stop to this useless and unwise performance and to be manly and strong instead, in all their actions in support of what they honestly and rationally consider to be right and just."⁶⁹

Warqneh was not the only Ethiopian to situate the Northeast African crisis in an international context. A certain Gebrehiwet, a university student in Switzerland, was persuaded by a patriotic fervor to join first the underground resistance in Ethiopia and then the anti-fascist forces in

⁶⁹Warqneh Martin, "India and the War," NTEN May 17, 1941.

Spain.⁷⁰ Abdisa Agga, a well-celebrated Ethiopian military hero, escaped from an Italian prison only to join the Partisans of Yugoslavia. By themselves these were anecdotal examples of the extraordinary type. Nevertheless, such individual actions, together with Sylvia's publications, heralded the beginning of a new era in which Ethiopians saw themselves not only as Africans but also as members of the oppressed peoples worldwide. Warqneh, Melaku, Abdisa and Gebrehiwet would serve as role models to a generation of Ethiopian diplomats, a few of whom gained prominence in the fifties as champions of anti-colonialism.

Sylvia, Du Bois and Ethiopian Sovereignty

Ethiopia was rendered a British military dependency following the removal of Italy in 1941. The full restoration of Ethiopian political and territorial integrity therefore became Sylvia's next rallying point. She campaigned unceasingly against the 1942 Anglo-Ethiopian treaty which reduced Ethiopia to little more than a trusteeship. Together with the Ethiopian government's own diplomatic maneuvers, her campaign paid off and in 1944 a second Anglo-Ethiopian treaty was signed which fully respected Ethiopia's sovereignty.

⁷⁰Bahru Zewde, The Ethiopian Intelligentsia and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Boston: Boston University African Studies Series, 1991), p. 21.

While the second Anglo-Ethiopian treaty was a victory, Eritrea's future still remain uncertain enough to detain Sylvia's attention.

Until the fifteenth century Eritrea had been an integral part of Ethiopia. Thereafter, the littoral province had suffered a series of foreign occupations: Turkish, Egyptian and Italian. Of these, only the Italians extended their presence beyond the coastal lowlands and laid effective claim to the Eritrean hinterlands which had hitherto remained well within Ethiopian political jurisdiction. Even though Britain administered Eritrea as a mandate following the collapse of the Italian rule, the colony's fate still remained as ambiguous as ever before. Possible plans included the continuation of the British rule, the splitting of the province between Sudan and Ethiopia, the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, and the reannexation of Eritrea by Italy.

Touting the Ethiopian government's line of argument, Sylvia lobbied for the reunification of Eritrea with Ethiopia. The region's intertwined cultural and political history, Ethiopia's need for an outlet to the sea, and the continuous influx of Eritreans to Ethiopia in search of full citizenship rights, constituted the basis of her pro-unity conviction.⁷¹

⁷¹Sylvia Pankhurst and Richard Pankhurst, Ethiopia and

While the suffragette herself headed the pro-unity agitation in Europe, she hoped her black American contacts would do the same in the New World. Aware of the sympathy that the Ethiopian invasion had aroused among peoples of color, Sylvia initiated a series of correspondence with W. E. B. Du Bois regarding the controversy on Eritrea.⁷² "I hope that you will see your way to agitate in America against the proposals of Mr. [James F.] Byrnes of placing the Ex-Italian Colonies under Trusteeship. This will really mean a new Colony for someone, probably Britain." Hoping to win Du Bois' support to the Ethiopian cause, she concluded her letter with a somewhat sentimental note: "Ethiopia is going ahead well, and her progress will be a help to the whole of the coloured races. I do hope for your energetic support."⁷³

To Sylvia's abrupt and somewhat naive communication, Du Bois' response was equally noncommittal if abrasive. "I do not think that you or most English liberals have any clear idea of the status and effort of American Negroes." On the

Eritrea: The Last Phase of the Reunion Struggle, 1941-1952
(London: Lallibela House, 1953), pp. 61-94 and 181-90.

⁷²Du Bois first heard of the Pankhursts while attending a conference in London in 1911, but did not meet Sylvia in person until his trip to the pan-African congress in Manchester in 1945. See Du Bois's tribute to Sylvia in Ethiopia Observer 5, 1 (1960), p. 52.

⁷³Herbert Aptheker, ed., The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), vol. III p. 133.

one hand, Du Bois agreed that black Americans exercised some say in their government's attitude toward the colored republics, as in the case of Haiti and Liberia. But on the other hand, his response made it clear that American government had the habit of turning a deaf-ear to its black constituents. "Whenever we try, as of course we must try, to help our fellow Africans in other parts of the world, our work is looked upon as interference and with that attitude goes usually the assumption that we are busybodies who must be ignored."⁷⁴

Du Bois' response emphasized the need for Africans and diasporic blacks to know each other more through direct contacts than through third party, often a source of more misunderstanding. He observed that Ethiopians had long been led to believe by their Western advisors that "any appearance of sympathy between them and American Negroes would be unwise." What tied Ethiopia to New World blacks, Du Bois continued, was not just racial sentiments but also obvious political factors. "It is not simply a matter of common blood, which is certainly great between Ethiopia and us, but much more than that, it is a question of cultural status and sharing the same problems of oppression."⁷⁵

Regarding Sylvia's plea for joint political action on

⁷⁴Ibid p. 133.

⁷⁵Ibid.

Ethiopia's behalf, Du Bois suggested that efforts first be made toward creating a more open and direct channel of communication between the races. "No one has appreciated more than I the long and courageous effort which you have made for the freedom of Ethiopia; but I strongly believe that you would be helped if your alliance with American Negroes and your understanding of their efforts were more complete." To that end, and as the first step toward the launching of an interracial political platform, the New Englander recommended the convening of a conference "between Americans of Negro descent, Africans, and their white friends."⁷⁶

The correspondence between Sylvia and Du Bois continued intermittently for more than a decade. Far from drawing the two together, their letters reveal extreme stubbornness and lack of flexibility on both sides. In 1954 Du Bois wrote to Sylvia to see if she could make an arrangement for the emperor to meet with "American Negroes" during his upcoming visit to the U.S.⁷⁷ Although Sylvia warmed up to the idea, in her response she broke into a diatribe about her preference for the word "Afro-American" over the word "Negro": "I think myself that Mr. [Edward] Lawson is not wrong in referring to the negroes of America as Afro-Americans, for I believe the term Negro can only apply to one-third of Africa and the

⁷⁶Ibid pp. 133-4.

⁷⁷Ibid p. 356.

Africans in America have come from many parts." Further exposing her naivete on the matter, Sylvia repeated what had then become a common racial fallacy, namely that the Ethiopians were not "Negroes" and that they rejected any association with that label: "I think it wise to inform you that Ethiopia does not welcome the name Negro, not because she wishes to cast any slur on the Negro of America or of Africa, but because it does not seem to appear to be correct as applied to Ethiopia."⁷⁸

Even though the letter reflects certain outdated racial notions, Sylvia herself was not a bigot. In fact, the point she made above was equally popular among many black intellectuals of her time. In the thirties and forties, French Caribbean and African writers had formulated the concept of Negritude which, rather than challenge conventional racial wisdom, took pride in values that were hitherto considered peculiarly African and inferior, and in so doing transformed the negative and the backward into a positive self affirmation. The downside of Negritude was that it paid credence to the Darwinian notion that distinct races held distinct characteristics, hence its limited popularity. To Sylvia's credit, nowhere in her writing is such racial characterization evident. She recognized the use of the term "Negro" only for its physical and geographic connotations and

⁷⁸Ibid p. 357.

nothing more. Even then, she challenged the applicability of that term to American blacks since not all of them originated in West Africa or bore physical resemblances to peoples of that region.

Du Bois made no effort to understand Sylvia's line of argument. He agreed the word "Negro" was not a "logical" term but had been so commonly used it had become conventional. "Hyphenated words like 'Afro-American' are awkward," he added.⁷⁹ Sylvia, always on the look out for new intellectual frontiers, may have relished her debate with Du Bois with academic gusto. The latter, on the other hand, did not own up to his image as a great thinker, and the tone of his penmanship was generally defensive if not dismissive. Just as Sylvia had taken the liberty to use the word "Afro-American" in her letter, he provocatively chose to use the pejorative name Abyssinia in his response to her: "am very grateful for your willingness to bring the existence of our fifteen million people to the attention of the emperor of Abyssinia."⁸⁰

In response to Du Bois's request, black America was included in Haile Selassie's 1954 travel plan to the United States. In addition to a visit to Howard University, where

⁷⁹Ibid p. 359.

⁸⁰Du Bois used the name Ethiopia in all his prior correspondences with the suffragette. So his use of the name Abyssinia in this case was deliberate. Ibid.

the emperor received an honorary doctor's degree, he attended Sunday mass at the Harlem-based Abyssinian Baptist Church, one of the oldest black religious institutions in the country.⁸¹ In subsequent trips to the Western Hemisphere, Haile Selassie would make similar suggestive gestures. In October 1963 he gave an exclusive interview to Ebony, the African-American monthly,⁸² and on the same occasion paid a visit to the Lincoln Memorial from where Martin Luther King had recently delivered his famous "I have a Dream" speech.⁸³

The Sylvia-Du Bois communications opened the way for further contacts between the Ethiopian government and black America. In 1948, the Ethiopian ambassador in Washington, Ras Imru, met with Du Bois on the embassy grounds.⁸⁴ However, the encounter between the two was more remarkable for the fact that it happened than for what it actually achieved. As Du Bois' follow-up letter indicates, the ambassador was interested in discussing domestic racial issues, while his

⁸¹Ethiopian Ministry of Information, "Girmawinetachew American Sigobengyu," July 1954.

⁸²Allan Morrison, "Selassie's Message to the Negro," Ebony 19, 2 (1963), pp. 30-32.

⁸³Ethiopian Ministry of Information, "Girmawi Negusse Negest be United States Yaderegut Gubnyt," October 1963.

⁸⁴The meeting was proposed by Imru. In his invitation letter to Du Bois, written on August 30, 1948, the Ras stated that he wanted to "acquaint" himself with the "general condition" of African-Americans, and "to exchange views of mutual interest in cultural, historical and other matters." Aptheker, The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois p. 210.

counterpart had hoped to explore the possibility of hosting a major pan-African conference in Ethiopia.

I had hoped to discuss with you ways in which two great branches of the black race-the 15 million people of your country and the 13 million Americans of Negro descent, might collaborate in the future for progress, survival and cultural expansion. On the other hand, your chief interest was inquiry into the discrimination against people of color in the United States and what steps we were taking to eliminate it. You naturally assumed that we as Americans are at least in part responsible for our country's failure to live up to its own laws and declarations and were curious to know my attitude toward discrimination. On the other hand, I assumed that you were more or less familiar with our long struggle for equality in this land and its results. We were, perhaps, both wrong in part. American Negroes are not responsible for discrimination in this land; they are the victims of it.⁸⁵

The Ambassador, unversed as he was in the dynamics of African-American history, might have entertained certain naive, if misconstrued, notions about American race relations. But no less surprisingly, Du Bois proved to be preoccupied more with abstract ideas than with finding common grounds of mutual understanding. Imru had been in the U.S. for only two years and his knowledge of American society outside the diplomatic circle could only have been superficial. Similarly, other than a scholarly interest in the country, Du Bois had no firsthand knowledge of Ethiopians, of their culture and social subtleties. Lacking in the Imru-Du Bois encounter was a Melaku-like interlocutor,

⁸⁵Ibid pp. 211-12.

one whose presence would have facilitated a healthy exchange of ideas. A potentially promising start in an intra-racial dialog thus came to an abortive end despite the manifestation of good will on both sides.

Less explicit reasons may have also contributed to the premature conclusion of the above exchange. A week had barely lapsed following the Imru-Du Bois' encounter on the embassy ground when the Ras found himself being the center of national attention. In a gathering at the Constitution Hall, where President Truman was the scheduled speaker, the Ethiopian Ambassador was escorted out of the diplomatic section by an unidentified guard. Despite an official apology by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the host of the event, the Jim Crow incident became sensational enough to have appeared on the New York Times' front page the next day.⁸⁶ The first of its type in the Ambassador's two-year-long stay in Washington, the timing of the event was more than coincidental. The action could easily have been perceived by Imru as an attempt by U.S. intelligence to discourage formal contacts between him and radical race activists. Whatever the reason for the Constitutional Hall fiasco, The Ethiopian Minister would henceforth be more wary in his involvement in domestic

⁸⁶"Colorline for Ethiopian Envoy at Science Session Brings Apology," New York Times September 16, 1948.

issues. In any case, Du Bois would later face censure by McCarthyites for his supposed membership in the Communist Party, a fact that rendered further contacts between him and the ambassador even more unlikely.

On the one hand, Sylvia's and Imru's communications with Du Bois represented one more incomplete chapter in post-war Ethio-African-American interactions. On the other hand, Du Bois's correspondences with the above individuals, however intermittent or short-lived, helped engage black American interest in Ethiopia, sometimes verging on the romantic. In an article Du Bois wrote in the late fifties, he described Haile Selassie's policy of post-war reconstruction in glowing terms. By pitting "the capitalist nations against each other," Haile Selassie tactfully kept Ethiopia outside the sphere of European influence. He made deals with the Dutch to construct sugar refineries, with the Swedes to run the new air force school, with the Belgians and the British to train the army and the police respectively. "The land is rich and plentiful," Du Bois observed. "There is no race nor color prejudice, and intermarriage is encouraged."⁸⁷

Du Bois, nevertheless, understood that Ethiopian post-war progress rested entirely on one man's shoulders, and therefore wondered about the country's political fate after

⁸⁷W. E. B. Du Bois, The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part which Africa has Played in World History (New York: International Publishers, 1965), pp. 168-69.

the emperor's death. Would it be "a capitalist private profit regime, or an increasingly democratic socialism; or some form of communism?"⁸⁸ His intuition about the uncertainty of Ethiopia's future in the post-emperor era proved prophetic, although Du Bois himself did not live long enough to witness it. Haile Selassie's ouster by a Marxist junta in 1974 would plunge the country into a downhill spiral, a detriment from which Ethiopia has not since recovered.

Sylvia and Ethiopia Observer

Although the years 1936-1941 represented the peak in her struggle against oppression, Sylvia's anti-fascist preoccupation was not confined to the war years alone. Having played an indispensable role in the liberation of Ethiopia and Eritrea, the renowned suffragette was even more vocal in her anti-colonial crusades in the fifties. Her Ethiopia Observer, which began publishing in Addis Ababa in December 1956, often carried potent anti-colonial articles, some of which might have been considered seditious elsewhere in the continent. The fact that such articles were freely printed in Ethiopia was in itself suggestive of the Ethiopian state of mind as well as of Sylvia's. In the mid-fifties, Sylvia had permanently moved to Addis Ababa, where a government-provided

⁸⁸Ibid p. 270.

villa and a chauffeur-driven car awaited her in lieu of her long service to the country. Whatever she wrote about Ethiopia in this period therefore had the stamp of government approval even more so than before. This is not to say that Sylvia was told what to say or write, but rather the fact that she single-mindedly tried to promote Ethiopia and its monarchy in whatever venture she undertook.⁸⁹

In a decade when few Ethiopians traveled abroad or had access to the foreign press, Sylvia's paper augmented the few locally-published papers as a major source of African news. Almost every other issue of the Observer included coverage on Africa. One article discussed racism faced by the post-war Caribbean immigrants to Britain.⁹⁰ Another issue bore impressionistic essays by several African students at UCAA. In some instances, whole issues were dedicated to particular topics of Sylvia's choice. Her January 1959 issue presented an encyclopedic survey of contemporary Kenyan politics,⁹¹ while her posthumous publication of October 1960 focused entirely on the second "Conference of Independent African States."⁹²

⁸⁹Romero, Portrait of a Radical pp. 76-77.

⁹⁰"Justice Salmon's Great Decision Against Racism," Ethiopia Observer 3, 2 (March 1959), p. 63.

⁹¹"Special Issue on Kenya," Ethiopia Observer 2, 12 (January 1959), pp. 393-440.

⁹²"Conference of Independent African States," Ethiopia

How widely the Observer circulated outside Ethiopia is not clear, although it seems to have been distributed in parts of East Africa and possibly elsewhere in the continent through Sylvia's personal network. "I receive regularly and read 'Ethiopia observer' with interest," one letter from a reader in Uganda stated. "I was recently most particularly impressed by 'The Emperor's Speech on his Eastern Tour' published in March 1957 in the 'Ethiopia Observer', the letter continued. "I think His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, is the wisest ruler in Africa today. I regard him as the personification of Ideal African personality and dignity."⁹³

Writing in the wake of Nkrumah's rise to power, another contributor, a West African, expressed the euphoric sentiment shared across the continent as a result of Ghana's independence. "Oh, Ghana, what a joy thy liberty brings to the Black Man's heart, bruised by centuries of serfdom, injustice and wrongs committed in Africa in the form of cut-throat imperialism!" The essay resorted to a sweeping indictment of whites in Africa, but that did not bias negatively Sylvia's editorial judgement. "Broken to Pieces are to-day those Ignominious fetters of slavery in Ghanaland,

Observer 4, 9 (October 1960), pp. 278-320.

⁹³"A Letter from Semakula Mulumba," Ethiopia Observer 1, 10 (November 1957), p. 340.

where White Men, Paying hypocritical lip-service to Christ's principles, Poached human beings as articles of trade."⁹⁴

As mentioned earlier, in 1940 Sylvia, however genuinely committed to the Ethiopian cause, was too reluctant to write a complete obituary on Melaku because of his association with racial nationalists. Travels in Africa and encounters with nationalist leaders gradually neutralized Sylvia's antipathy to the concept of nationalism, at least insofar as the anti-colonial struggle was concerned. By the 1950s the renowned feminist had thus metamorphosed into an ardent advocate of African nationalism as her articles in the Observer indicate. In championing tirelessly the struggle for African independence, Sylvia and her monthly can in this sense be seen as having transformed Ethiopia into an important pan-African center long before the advent of the OAU.

Sylvia passed away in her Addis Ababa home in September 1960 at the age of 78. She was given a state funeral at the Holy Trinity Cathedral, attended by the emperor and thousands of admirers. Testament to her unique commitment to the African cause and to the international respect she commanded among peoples of color were countless letters of condolences and tributes, several of which were published in a subsequent

⁹⁴A. Artan, "The Progress of the African Continent," Ethiopia Observer 1, 8 (September 1957), p. 268.

issue of the Observer.⁹⁵ Her immediate legacies to Ethiopia included the establishment of the Princess Tsehay Hospital and the founding of social service agencies and women's associations. Her long-term and most important impact lay, however, in her literary contributions. Her militantly pro-African publications bridged some of the psychological gap between Ethiopia and colonial Africa. Although primarily interested in Ethiopian issues, NTEN and Ethiopia Observer regularly carried articles by African contributors often dealing with greater continental issues. As vehicles of pan-African dialogue, both papers served unique functions as self-reflective, intra-racial mirrors. Just as other Africans felt ever drawn to Ethiopia in reading Sylvia's publications, so too Ethiopians became conscious of a larger continental identity by reading in the same papers what other Africans had to say about their country and its place in black Africa.

⁹⁵"Words of Appreciation and Tributes," Ethiopia Observer 5, 1 (1960), pp. 47-58.

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BOND WITHOUT BLOOD
A STUDY OF ETHIOPIAN-CARIBBEAN TIES, 1935-1991

VOLUME II

By

Fikru N. Gebrekidan

A DISSERTATION

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The British Interlude

More than any other contemporary documents, the second volume of Haile Selassie's autobiography best captures the overall anti-European spirit that the Italian invasion created among Ethiopians. The Lion of Judah dictated his memoir with a self-conscious reservation always imploring the royal "We." There were instances, however, during which he unveiled what must have been his innermost feelings. In one section, he remembered bitterly what he thought was an unscrupulous and prejudicial British legal practice. Prior to the war the Ethiopian Government had purchased stocks in a British Cable and Wireless Company. Following his flight to England, Haile Selassie was denied access to the investment with the excuse that he no longer represented a sovereign government. The court to which the monarch took the case accepted the Company's line of argument and, adding insults upon injury, made the former liable for the latter's legal defense cost.⁹⁶ Despite feeling wronged and cheated by his European hosts, Tefari's racial resentments were tempered by his gratitude to England for being his safe refuge during the

⁹⁶Haile Selassie, My Life and Ethiopia's Progress (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), pp. 36-38.

war. The legal injustice, nonetheless, rendered the king's monetary standing ever so precarious that he nearly accepted a financial offer by none other than Italy in exchange for his official abdication from the throne.

In the last chapter of his memoir, Haile Selassie is even less reserved in his remarks about his post-war relations with the British. This is perhaps the most revealing part of the autobiography as the Power of Trinity openly lashes out against British snobbery and racism. Contrary to what many writers have said about the emperor's self perception as non-African, this section shows Haile Selassie's view of himself and his subjects as black Africans.

The ejection of Italy from Ethiopia in May 1941 heralded the triumphant end of the war as far as Ethiopians were concerned. At the same time, the fascists' departure after five years of brutal occupation revived the painful reality that the war-torn country had to be rebuilt from scratch. Under the fascist rule, cataloged Haile Selassie, about 750,000 Ethiopians were killed, 14 million head of cattle slaughtered, 500,000 houses destroyed, 2000 churches ransacked, and 75 percent of the country's intelligentsia liquidated. For a country of less than 15 million, the crisis needed an urgent national attention, but the ominous task of

reconstruction was complicated by the British interlude.⁹⁷

Having helped dislodge the Italians from Northeast Africa, the British forces did not immediately leave Ethiopia. Rather, Ethiopia was seen as Occupied Enemy Territory and placed under the control of the British East African Military Command with its headquarters in Nairobi. Accordingly, whatever war booty left behind by the Italians it went to the British, even though the actual fighting was done mostly by Ethiopian patriots. Around the western town of Jima, for example, the Ethiopians were responsible for driving the fascists out. Yet arriving at the scene late, British troops opened fire and wounded several Ethiopians in an effort to recapture the spoils. "The British," Haile Selassie observed, "took all the military equipment captured in our country . . . openly and boldly saying that it should not be left for the service of blacks."⁹⁸

Although the extent of the British involvement with the Ethiopian government was defined more clearly under the 1942 Anglo-Ethiopian treaty the relationship between the two countries was far from equal. If anything, the agreement proved Ethiopia's de facto colonial status. The treaty forced Haile Selassie to compromise his government's sovereignty--including the ability to declare war--in exchange for British

⁹⁷Ibid p. 169.

⁹⁸Ibid pp. 172-73.

economic assistance. Control of the police and the judiciary, as well as the task of fiscal planning, were rendered British responsibilities. The treaty put the eastern border district of Ogaden under full British military administration and also accepted Eritrea's status as a mandate territory. Eritrea, historically part of Ethiopia, but a Roman colony since the 1890s, was handed over to Britain by the League of Nations in 1941.⁹⁹

Emboldened by the 1942 agreement, British soldiers in Ethiopia remained antagonistic to Haile Selassie's effort of solidifying the power of the central government. In order to justify continued British military presence, the white officers spread rumors of anarchy and lawlessness, and some were directly implicated with trying to stir up ethnic unrest in parts of the country.¹⁰⁰ Indifferent to complaints by the central government, the British installed the well-known fascist collaborator Haile Selassie Gugsa as the governor of Tigray. Gugsa's appointment, as expected, was met by vehement Ethiopian resentment and suspicion, neither of which was without sufficient ground. The puppet was caught corresponding with the fascists. Despite Addis Ababa's request for his extradition, he was banished first to Asmara

⁹⁹Bahru Zewde, A History of Modern Ethiopia pp. 179-81.

¹⁰⁰Haile Selassie, My Life and Ethiopia's Progress p. 173.

and then to the far off Seychelles.¹⁰¹

"In general, the British stopped at nothing to divide Our people and make the government hated," Haile Selassie noted in his autobiography. The British controlled the source of state revenue and taxation and, by imposing an austere fiscal policy on the government that made the payment of salaries almost impossible, tried to sow seeds of discontent among the civil servants.¹⁰²

Such hostile environments notwithstanding, the fragile Government continued on its peace-time reconstruction course as best as it could. All the same, the British presence in Ethiopia provoked racial resentments and Haile Selassie, for all his modesty, was candid enough to admit it. "On the other hand," he wrote, "We began to hear that some of our people were saying that we drove out one white man only to replace him with another. As they said on the street, if this was the result of everything, then what was wrong with the Italians?"¹⁰³

As a result of relentless diplomatic arm-twisting by the Haile Selassie government, A second Anglo-Ethiopian arrangement was signed in 1944. The agreement restored

¹⁰¹In 1947, Haile Selassie Gugsu returned to Ethiopia where he was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment. Ibid pp. 173-74.

¹⁰²Ibid p. 174.

¹⁰³Ibid.

Ethiopia's full political sovereignty, at least in all the provinces other than in Eritrea and a district in Ogaden. Continued British suzerainty over the remaining territories was left open to further negotiation and no longer impinged on Addis Ababa's power to act independently.

The closure of the British chapter posed new challenges as Ethiopia had to design a consistent and coherent foreign policy in accordance with national interest. In the post-war decades, Haile Selassie pursued a more aggressive and diversified foreign policy strategy. On the one hand, he revived the pre-war ties with the U.S. and the European powers. On the other hand, he invested his country's resources in cultivating close friendship with third world countries. From Bandung to Accra, from Geneva to New York, Ethiopia was represented by seasoned diplomats whose views on African issues were closely watched and heeded. "Ethiopia, in so many ways the least African of the African states," thus became "the major spokesman for Africa," in the words of Robert Hess.¹⁰⁴

The Foreign Policy Vision

The impetus behind Ethiopia's African consciousness

¹⁰⁴Robert Hess, Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 214.

came in the late thirties and early forties in reaction to Italian and British presence. Haile Selassie's conviction in collective security complemented this newly awakened African identity. From personal experience in the mid-thirties, the Elect of God understood the precariousness of Ethiopian independence as long as the entire continent was not free, hence his exemplary role in the support of African freedom struggle.

Peter Schwab, a British scholar, has argued that Haile Selassie's interest in African politics emanated from the search for personal glory. Central to Haile Selassie's megalomaniac personality was a sense of insecurity and fear of being dominated by his younger and better-educated continental rivals like Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure. Ambition for greater international recognition and a selfish pursuit of power was, according to the Marxist Schwab, what drove the aging emperor to put his full diplomatic weight behind the politics of pan-Africanism.¹⁰⁵

Schwab is one of the few Western scholars who wrote favorably of Ethiopia's experiment with socialism in the seventies and eighties, even though the decades are remembered by most Ethiopians as the bloodiest in their country's entire history. The basis for Schwab's negative

¹⁰⁵Peter Schwab, Haile Selassie I: Ethiopia's Lion of Judah (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), pp. 101-114.

characterization of Haile Selassie is therefore more ideological than factual. True, the pan-African politics of the late fifties was as much a contest of personalities as of ideas, and the search for fame and power was an important consideration by the individuals involved. But is not politics by its very nature about competition and rivalry, thriving on the need for recognition and influence?

Schwab's argument that Haile Selassie's involvement in African issues was initiated by a purely ulterior motive, likewise, belies the multi-faceted interaction between Ethiopia and the rest of Africa in the fifties and the sixties. Instead of being a one man's struggle for continental ascendancy, the policy of Africanization characterized the Ethiopian state of mind both at institutional and intellectual levels.

The Personality Factor

The architects behind Haile Selassie's Africa policy were seasoned diplomats, among them the Foreign Minister Ketema Yifru,¹⁰⁶ the U.N. Ambassador Haddis Alemayehu and his successor Endalkachew Makonnen,¹⁰⁷ and the respected pan-

¹⁰⁶Ayalew Mandefro, "Farewell Ketema Yifru," Ethiopian Review 4, 2 (February 1994), pp. 15-18.

¹⁰⁷Endalkachew Makonnen, "Ethiopia and Africa: The Economic Aspect," Ethiopia Observer 8, 1 (November 1964), p.

African sports official Yidnekachew Tesemma.

Although a talented artist, Haddis Alemayehu did his writings on his spare time since his source of livelihood depended on his full-time employment with the government, and it was through his role as a diplomat than as a writer that he served shape Ethiopia's political image. According to Molvaer, one foreign policy change attributed to Haddis in the 1950s was the adoption of a strong anti-Apartheid stance by the Ethiopian government. Because of Jan Smuts' genuine sympathy for Ethiopia during the war, and because of the deployment of South African troops in the anti-fascist military operation in Northeast Africa, Haile Selassie had entertained a noblesse oblige attitude toward the Boer government. That policy changed while Haddis was serving as his country's representative to the United Nations, and Ethiopia henceforth became a leading critic of the racist regime.¹⁰⁸

Haddis, who served as an officer in the patriotic front, and saw firsthand the disastrous effect on civilians of Italy's resort to mustard gas and indiscriminate aerial bombardment, spearheaded a campaign to stop France's use of

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¹⁰⁸Reidulf Knut Molvaer, Black Lions: The Creative Lives of Modern Ethiopia's Literary Giants and Pioneers (Lawrenceville, Red Sea Press, 1997), p. 140.

the Sahara for its nuclear tests.¹⁰⁹ He introduced to the U.N. general assembly the "so-called Ethiopian Resolution," which sought to put a freeze on further production of nuclear weapons. The "Resolution" was accepted by the General Assembly but failed to be ratified because of its rejection by the great powers. "Ethiopian resolution" nonetheless put in full motion the international campaign against the spread of nuclear weapons. It particularly inspired the 1961 Irish proposal, which called for a more sweeping nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty, and which was subsequently ratified by most countries.¹¹⁰

Haddis's diplomatic career ended in the mid-sixties following the publication of an incendiary political novel. His stature outside Ethiopia was supplanted by younger proteges, among them Yidnekachew Tesemma, the champion of African interests in the international sport community. One of the founding stars of the St. Georgis Team, Ethiopia's oldest and premier soccer club, Yidnekachew was instrumental in his country's admission into FIFA in 1953. In 1957, he attended the formation of the Confederation of African Football in Khartoum and, four years later, was chosen as CAF's vice president, a post he shared with the Ghanian Ohene Djan. In 1971, he replaced the Egyptian Abdel Aziz Salem as

¹⁰⁹Ibid pp. 136-38.

¹¹⁰Ibid pp. 141-42.

the organization's president, a position he held until his death in August 1987.¹¹¹

During his long tenure, Yidnekachew gained respect for his administrative efficiency, and for making CAF both profitable and self-reliant. He was equally admired for his combative stance against racism in sports. South Africa had been represented at the first CAF conference in Khartoum but then withdrew when confronted by the anti-apartheid lobby put up by Yidnekachew. CAF eventually imposed an official boycott on South Africa in the aftermath of the Sharpville massacre. Apartheid again became a controversial sports' topic when the IOC decided to invite South Africa to the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City. As Ethiopia's official spokesperson, Yidnekachew called for an international boycott of the games in protest. His campaign held sway on at least forty countries and eventually forced the IOC to recant its invitation.¹¹²

The Institutional Factor

If Haddis and Yidnekachew embodied their generation's Africa-oriented intellectual sentiment, a similar political

¹¹¹Olu Amadasun, History of Football in Africa (Lagos: Time's Books, 1994), pp. 5-20.

¹¹²Ibid pp. 174-76.

evolution was even more apparent at the institutional level. In November 1960 Ethiopia and Liberia, Africa's only signatories to the now defunct League of Nations, took South Africa to the Hague-based International Court of Justice over the issue of Namibia. The German colony had been trusted as a mandate administration to South Africa by the League of Nations after the first world war. Ethiopia and Liberia, backed by the newly independent states, argued that South Africa had illegally overextended the trusteeship terms and turned Namibia into a colony. The plaintiffs demanded that the administration of Namibia be taken over by the United Nations, the successor to the League, but the proposal was rejected by Verwoerd's government who denied any legal link between the two international bodies. On July 18, 1966, after six years of litigation, the Court dropped the Southwest African case on technical grounds; but the effort, nonetheless, underscored Ethiopia's commitment to the liberation struggle.¹¹³

Ethiopia's contribution to the anti-apartheid cause included the extension of military training to several members of the African National Congress armed wing, ANC, among them Nelson Mandela. "Our programme was strenuous," Mandela would reminisce in his memoir, regarding the two-month military drill in the outskirts of Addis Ababa in 1962.

¹¹³Hess, Ethiopia p. 238.

"We trained from 8 a.m. until 1 p. m., broke for a shower and lunch, and then again from 2 to 4 p. m." Mandela added that they practiced target shooting, learned how to handle firearms, concoct explosives, demolish mines and a range of other insurgency techniques. "I felt myself being moulded into a soldier and began to think as a soldier thinks--a far cry from the way a politician thinks."¹¹⁴

Ethiopian involvement with Africa encompassed a wider scope than the aforementioned examples. Reflective of the Ethiopian Government's self-image as the intellectual torch bearer of a new Africa was the establishment of the Haile Selassie I Prize Trust. Modeled after the Nobel Prize Foundation, the Trust sought the "strengthening of the spiritual and cultural bonds between the Ethiopian people and the peoples of the African continent and the whole world." Between 1963 and 1974, the Trust dispensed annual awards to 50 distinguished candidates, 19 of them non-Ethiopians, in the area of fine arts and the sciences. Winners of the African Research Award, the most prestigious prize, fetching a sum of 70,000 birr, included the Howard University professor of history, William Leo Hansberry; the British Africanist, Basil Davidson; and the Senegalese poet laureate,

¹¹⁴Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Boston: Little Brown, 1994), p. 265.

President Leopole Sedar Senghor.¹¹⁵

In the socio-economic arena, the Ethiopian Airlines stood out for its pioneering role in African air travel. Besides being less developed, air travel in colonial Africa was long and expensive, since it often involved a circuitous flight via Europe. By 1960-61 EAL had procured landing rights in the strategically situated African capitals, from Nairobi in the east to Monrovia in the west, becoming the first trans-African carrier with direct flight schedules between the two ends of the continent. As its own publication put it, the EAL was now to Africa what the trans-Siberian railroad had been to Russia more than half a century earlier.¹¹⁶ Geography no longer posed an insurmountable barrier with the advent of the sky bridge, but the positive application of such modern innovation to continental commerce still demanded mutual cooperation. The Ethiopian government on its part continued to promote intra-national institutions including roads, universities, cultural and educational exchange programs, but the level of commitment to such practical ventures was soon overshadowed by ideological differences and petty personal politics among the new independent leaders.

¹¹⁵The Haile Selassie I Prize Trust (Institute of Ethiopian Studies), pp. 22 and 104-5.

¹¹⁶Ethiopian Airlines, Bringing Africa Together: the Story of Ethiopian airlines (Addis Ababa, 1988), pp. 95-102.

Unity Versus Unification

Ethiopia's lasting imprints on Africa lay in the political arena, for, beyond any other factors, Haile Selassie's personal mystique as Africa's eldest statesman was responsible for the creation of the Organization of African Unity. The drive for African unity began in earnest after the 1957 independence of Ghana, until then the Gold Coast. In April 1958 Kwame Nkrumah convened in his capital, Accra, the first conference of "All Independent African States" to which Ethiopia was represented by Haile Selassie's youngest son, Prince Sahle Selassie. Whereas Guinea and Egypt sided with Ghana in calling for the immediate unification of Africa, Ethiopia and Liberia adopted a more cautious position. In fact, Ethiopia's message to the conference mentioned only the need for peace, collective security and unity of purpose.¹¹⁷

By the time Ethiopia played host to the Second Conference of the Independent States in June 1960, Haile Selassie's position on the question of unity had become well defined. Nkrumah's position had been that Africans should first seek the "political kingdom." Haile Selassie on the other hand saw economic cooperation as the necessary prerequisite for unity. He called for the construction of trans-

¹¹⁷Haile Selassie, Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty, 1918-1967 (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Information, 1967), p. 189.

national roads, the establishment of an African development bank, the merging of Africa's international air services, and the setting of cultural and educational exchange programs among the independent states. Without such fundamental economic restructuring, he argued, political independence was nothing less than a camouflage by which the ex-colonial powers continued their exploitation of Africa.¹¹⁸

The 1960 conference in the Ethiopian capital coincided with the eruption of civil war in Central Africa. Congo had gained independence from Belgium in June 1960. What began as a Congolese army revolt against its Belgian officers during the independence euphoria had, by fall 1960, escalated into a national civil war. There were three major rival factions involved. Supported by Belgian and South African mercenaries were Moise Cschombe and his Katangese secessionists. On the other side were Patrice Lumumba and Josef Kasavubu, prime minister and president respectively, each with his own faction along ethnic and regional lines. Subsequent intervention by an African coalition force under U.N. auspices could neither contain the civil war nor defend the prime minister and his office.¹¹⁹

A radical pan-Africanist and an advocate of a

¹¹⁸ Ibid pp. 199-204.

¹¹⁹ Vincent Bakpetu Thomson, Africa and Unity: The Evolution of Pan-Africanism (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), pp. 148-56.

centralized Congo state, Lumumba had become the embodiment of Congolese nationalism in the eyes of many Africans. His death at the hands of CIA-backed opposition forces in January 1961 caused an irreversible split between the conservative and the radical African states. After watching the Congo fiasco, the latter group became sharply aware of Africa's vulnerability to foreign manipulation and scaled up the call for unification. The conservative states, by contrast, continued to support Kasavubu and his vision of a loosely federated Congolese state. In order to express their support for Kasavubu and what he stood for, the conservative states, most of them French speaking, met at Brazzaville in December 1960 where they formed the Brazzaville Group. They were later joined by more countries during a meeting in the Liberian capital, hence the Monrovia group. This in turn prompted the radical states of Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Egypt and Morocco, all supporters of the deceased Lumumba and advocates of African unification, to form the Casablanca Group following a gathering in the North African namesake city.¹²⁰

When Nigeria hosted the third all-African conference in January 1962, the Casablanca member states boycotted the meeting because of Nigeria's active membership in the Monrovia club. While attending the tension-ridden Lagos conference, Haile Selassie explained that his country

¹²⁰Ibid pp. 154-59 and pp. 161-76.

belonged to neither the Monrovia nor the Casablanca camp. Ethiopia belonged to one group only, "the African group." In Lagos, the emperor embraced for the first time the concept of a singular African state, albeit with a qualification. Unlike Nkrumah, who insisted on unconditional and immediate dismantling of the colonial boundaries, Haile Selassie regarded unification as a gradual process. His Lagos proposal specifically called for the creation of a supra-national political body that would pave the path toward complete unity in a step-by-step process. Because of the absence of the Casablanca states, discussion on the proposal was postponed for the more comprehensive Addis Ababa conference the next year.¹²¹

The choice of the Ethiopian capital as the seat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, UNECA, in December 1959, had already established Addis Ababa's reputation as a neutral city. No state therefore resisted the invitation to yet one more conference in Ethiopia. Unlike the earlier conferences which pitted one group against another, the May 1963 summit would prove to be the decisive point in the history of pan-Africanism.¹²²

In his opening address, Haile Selassie spoke of unification as an evolutionary process, since existing

¹²¹Haile Selassie, Selected Speeches pp. 219 and 223-24.

¹²²Hess, Ethiopia pp. 235-36.

political and ideological differences impeded immediate political transformation. He then presented a modified draft of his Lagos proposal which called for the creation of the Organization of African Unity. He explained that the new organization would, among other things, prepare the way for a political integration aided by such trans-national institutions as the "African university" and the "African development bank." The emperor also suggested the formation of an African defence pact for mutual protection against foreign aggression. His draft did not fully satisfy either camp, and some of his points, like the joint defense force, were dismissed as too ambitious. The document was, nonetheless, regarded as the final synthesis of ideas and a logical compromise, hence its unanimous approval and the birth of the OAU.¹²³

By the mid-sixties, the Africanization process of Ethiopian governmental identity had been complete. In compliment to the choice of the Ethiopian capital as the permanent seat of the OAU headquarters, Haile Selassie had the honor of being unanimously voted as the first chairperson of the newly found trans-national organization. Notwithstanding simmering students' anti-imperial discontent domestically, Tefari's continental aura reached an all-time peak following his successful mediation of the Algeria-

¹²³Haile Selassie, Selected Speeches pp. 241-57.

Morocco border conflict in 1965. Such was the popularity of the King of Kings that the ELF-led¹²⁴ secessionist insurgency in the north was seen by most Africans more as a foreign-sponsored anathema than as a genuine nationalist struggle. ELF's support came mostly from the Middle East as well as from Somalia, Sudan, Egypt and the Maghrib. But unlike these countries, all of whom enjoyed membership in the Arab League, Ethiopia stood out as the only country in the region with an undivided loyalty to the OAU, hence the sympathy by most Sub-Saharan countries in its military operation against the separatist rebels.

The Student Movement

One of Haile Selassie's major contributions to Ethiopia's modernization process was in the area of education. Menelik had founded the first Western-type secular school and also introduced the practice of sending bright youths abroad for modern studies. Under Haile Selassie the tradition grew by leaps and bounds. According to a study by Randi Balsvik, before 1935 about 200 Ethiopians were trained at overseas educational centers. During the five-year Italian

¹²⁴ELF, Eritrean Liberation Front, was founded between the late fifties and early sixties by Muslim separatists. It was joined after 1966 by Christian Eritreans, who eventually established the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front, EPLF, under the leadership of Isayas Afeworki.

occupation period, the number of Ethiopians studying abroad fell to zero. In the post-liberation years, there was a drastic hike in college education, and in the first two decades alone about 550 Ethiopians had returned from higher studies abroad.¹²⁵

Since Ethiopia was an agrarian society with limited need for skilled or semi-skilled labor, universal primary education did not top the emperor's priority list. In order to match his government's top-down developmental pursuit, the educational system was expectedly geared toward the creation of an intellectual elite: a "talented tenth." The University College of Addis Ababa, UCAA, began operation in December 1950 with 25 students and 9 staff members, mainly French-Canadian Jesuits. This was followed by the establishment of more colleges in and outside Addis Ababa for specialties like agriculture, construction and medicine. In 1961, UCAA and the other colleges joined together to form the Haile Selassie University, HSIU, with a combined student body of less than one thousand.¹²⁶

Since the national university was expected to complement the emperor's fame and stature, many resources

¹²⁵Randi Ronning Balsvik, Haile Selassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977 (East Lansing: Michigan State University African Studies Center, 1985), p. 21.

¹²⁶"UCAA through the Years," News and Views December 14, 1961.

were invested in it with the hope of turning it into an intellectual lighthouse for the entire continent. Among the beneficiaries of the new facility were, in this regard, a number of African students, supported by Haile Selassie I scholarship scheme. The program became real in fall 1959, with the arrival of the first batch of students at UCAA, about 30 in all.

The students, most of them East Africans, were asked to write short autobiographical sketches for the April 1959 issue of the Ethiopian Observer. Their essays indicated that, despite the initial difficulties they encountered in their respective countries while going through the colonial red tape for exit visas and passports, they were well received once in Ethiopia. "We therefore feel we owe much to Ethiopia, for education alone will enable us to attain a position in this age of progress," wrote a Kenyan student.¹²⁷ "Ethiopian hospitality, long as I have enjoyed it, still leaves me breathless," remarked another matriculant from Ghana, and added: "The lavishness with which a busy man will give up precious time to receive and entertain a stranger, to whom he is in no way bound, remains for me one of the wonders of Africa."¹²⁸

¹²⁷Stanley J. Gulavi, "The Development of Friendship between Ethiopia and her Southern Neighbor," Ethiopia Observer 3, 3 (April 1959), p. 96.

¹²⁸Emmanuel Andah, "My First Two Months in Addis Ababa,"

The foreign students as a whole retained an active social lifestyle--from regularly contributing essays to student publications, to running for offices in the various student bodies, to dominating the Debating Society because of their proficiency in the English language. Some of the students went on to play prominent political roles after graduation. Robert Ouko, president of the Kenyan Student Association at UCAA in the early sixties, became his country's foreign minister in the eighties. One of Ouko's Tanganykan contemporaries on campus, George S. Magombe, was appointed the first Executive Secretary of the OAU Liberation Committee a few years after his graduation with a degree in economics. Sam Njoma, another scholarship matriculant in the mid-sixties, headed the Southwest African Peoples' Organization, SWAPO, and became Namibia's first president after independence.¹²⁹

National prestige might have been the unspoken rationale for the provision of the scholarships. All the same, the program exemplified a more practical and down-to-earth approach to pan-Africanism. "The African people cannot come to know and understand one another simply through the use of maps," the emperor told the first group of foreign students

Ibid p. 98.

¹²⁹"Former UCAA Student Now Heads the Liberation Committee," NV March 26, 1966.

at UCAA. Continental solidarity had to be promoted through academic and cultural exchange programs. "We shall not fail to send Ethiopian students to schools in other parts of Africa," the monarch promised, "so that the program of cultural and educational exchange, which We have initiated, will extend yet more widely."¹³⁰

Campus Militants and the African Personality

The presence of the scholarship students at UCAA was instrumental in the Ethiopians' redefinition of their national identity. Through their interaction with the foreign matriculants, Ethiopian students could now see past their national blinkers and appreciate the transcending political and socio-economic forces. Such was their earnest conviction in pan-Africanism they found Nkrumah's gospel of immediate unification more appealing than Haile Selassie's intermediate position.

Evidence of this newly grown African awareness among the collegians was the major campus publication, News and Views, whose role as a mouthpiece of pan-African radicalism remained unsurpassed. NV's editorial board comprised Ethiopian as well as African students, and its pool of

¹³⁰"The Emperor's Words to the Pan-African Students," Ethiopia Observer 3, 3 (April 1959), p. 74.

contributors was equally diverse. Recurrent weekly topics included themes such as the "African personality," African unity, the Congo crisis, South Africa, Rhodesia, and, to a certain extent, U.S. foreign policy and Vietnam.

The essays that appeared in the NV in the period between the late fifties and early sixties mirrored the optimistic expectations the generation had for Africa. "Africans are beginning to talk of the African personality," wrote a certain Tamiru Gobana. ". . . We cannot but wonder whether this new personality is not going to assert itself at the forum of world debate with a new form of ideology. The existing ideologies have recently tried to win over this new individual, but its personality proved so independent that it asserted itself with a glaring defiance of present ideologies."¹³¹

In a similar article, titled "Pan-Africanism or Balkanization," Neway Christos reflected a prevailing political view. "The days when one was led to think of pan-Africanism with an air of idealism have passed." Pan-Africanism is no longer a mere appraisal of the cultural and historic similarities that tie Africans together as one people. Political expediency and economic necessity dictate that the cause of unity be more practical. The mechanisms for

¹³¹Tamiru Gobana, "Necessity for African Thinkers," NV December 9, 1960.

African unity may not have been adequately defined by the interested parties. "Yet, these and other inconveniences which surround the concept of African solidarity should not be the cause of despair but rather an impetus for a realistic assessment of the present and the future."¹³²

During the peak of the civil war in Central Africa, NV was quick to gauge the campus-wide reaction following the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese Prime Minister. The students were "shocked" by the nationalist's premature death, the editorial for February 16, 1961, read. "In evidence of their feeling, they stood in silence for about five minutes as a tribute to the Congolese leader." Having described Lumumba's death as "regrettable," the paper announced that "his name will stand out as one of the great nationalists in the annals of African history."¹³³

Given the political bankruptcy of the newly independent African governments, it was not long before the euphoric mood of the early sixties gradually turned into sour disenchantment, and the discourse on pan-Africanism metamorphosed from celebratory praise to inflammatory rhetoric. The transition was not an overnight affair, however. Since the late fifties signs of anti-monarchical

¹³²Neway Christos Gebreab, "Pan-Africanism or Balkanization," NV October 5, 1961.

¹³³See NV's editorial for February 16, 1961, p. 1.

defiance were apparent among Ethiopian student activists. Having openly supported the 1960 coup attempt against their Government, the students had to march to the emperor's palace to express their repentance before they were readmitted into the university. The friction between the students on the one hand and the campus authority and the palace on the other continued latently until it openly exploded in the late sixties, becoming a factor in the subsequent overthrow of Haile Selassie.¹³⁴

The American Factor

The most potent external factor in the radicalization of the students' political consciousness in the mid-sixties was their resentment to the growing American influence.¹³⁵ Although U.S. presence in Ethiopia was associated with the establishment of a military base in Asmara in 1953, the number of American civilians in Ethiopia remained then relatively negligible. Moreover, they seem to have been more self-conscious than their future counterparts, mainly because of the negative publicity their country received as a result of the civil rights movement. The half apologetic and half

¹³⁴Kiflu Tadesse, The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party (Silver Spring: Independent Publishers, 1993), pp. 35-37.

¹³⁵Ibid p. 38.

bashful behavior of American officials in Addis Ababa in the fifties can be illustrated by a propaganda pamphlet distributed by the United States' Information Service.

Written both in Amharic and in English, the publication tried to preempt any anti-American sentiments in Ethiopia by drawing a positive picture about American race relations. While highlighting major African-American political achievements since the American war for independence, the tract deliberately said little about the history of American racial injustice both before and after emancipation. The pamphlet instead presented the antebellum slave-master relation with a more humane face by comparing it with European feudalism. "Just as in feudal European society, the white master had a definite obligation toward his slaves. He protected them in any difficulties, saw that they received considerate treatment from their overseers, and in general looked after their well-being. They were given cabins that were in no way inferior to those that house the landless whites."¹³⁶

At a governmental level, U.S.-Ethiopian relations grew stronger in the sixties with the arrival of hundreds of American Peace Corps volunteers and non-military personnel. While the former were stationed mostly in villages and rural

¹³⁶United States Information Service, "The American Negro," September 24, 1957.

towns, the latter constituted a good portion of the AAU faculty and administration staff, including the office of the vice president. The result was the ascendancy of American cultural influence in the urban areas. In reaction to this ever more visible American presence, words such as "cultural imperialism" and "yankee go home" became a familiar jargon in campus circles. Moreover, the collegians could now ideally explain their country's backwardness in such lofty concepts as "underdevelopment," "American imperialism," and "Western neocolonialism."

The mysterious assassination of President Kennedy, perceived by many as a genuine civil rights reformer and a champion for the underdog, only reinforced the students' mistrust of the super power. The Kennedy tragedy was seen as a major setback to the struggle for racial equality in America and the process of political decolonization in Africa. The student poet, Abebe Worke, thus expressed the loss felt by hispeers as a result of the President's death:

Wake up to see your America Abraham Lincoln
What a backwardly moving nation it has become,
Alas America- I woe thee, pity- pitiable.
What a Civilization! What progress.
Africa for Kennedy it weeps
and at thee America it laughs
As each and every Colored in thee does.¹³⁷

American motives toward Africa became suspect once again during the 1964 U.S.-Belgian intervention in the Congo.

¹³⁷Balsvik, Haile Selassie's Students p. 199.

The action warranted the dispatching of protest letters to President Johnson and the Belgian Foreign Minister by the UCAA Students Council. "From then on," wrote Balsvik, "the United States was put in the imperialist category. Its intentions in Africa were seriously questioned and African leaders were seen as accomplices of the imperialists: their stooges."¹³⁸

This supposedly "humanitarian" intervention in the Congo, only to result in the indiscriminate killing of Africans in order to save white lives, aroused angry responses. "To say that Americans are humanitarian is delusory," wrote Asmerom Kidane, a second year economic student. "Had Americans been humanitarians, they would have protected the rights of many Afro-Americans who are being continuously bombed, hanged and murdered." Asmerom suggested that Africans be allowed to solve their problems without foreign interferences. "Africa should be for Africans, and Congo must not be another South Vietnam."¹³⁹

Student anti-American sentiment rose to a crescendo during the infamous fashion show of spring 1968. Organized by a female peace corps volunteer, the women's fashion show was meant to attract mostly members of the expatriate community,

¹³⁸Ibid p. 200.

¹³⁹Asmerom Kidane, "The Unjustified Massacre," NV December 4, 1964.

the primary aim being the raising of funds for the renovation of the female dormitory. Campus girls were to parade themselves to a mostly Western audience in latest European designs, including the miniskirt, a daring rebellion against traditional female modesty. In what later became known as the "miniskirt riot," the occasion was disrupted by male protesters, who detected themes of cultural alienation and moral degradation in the seemingly harmless fashion show. What began as a campus incident soon spread outside the university premises, most of the attacks directed against the U.S. Information Service and the American Library, and eventually resulting in students' ejection from their dorms and the closure of the university.¹⁴⁰

Ironically, many of the protesters were themselves disciples of the swing era, sporting the defiant Afro hairstyle and the notorious bell bottom. The boys, who took part in harassing the female performers, saw no contradiction between their resort to what was inherently a chauvinist orgy and their image of their generation as the harbinger of gender equality. In their view, the miniskirt episode, an example of cultural neocolonialism, represented a challenge to traditional mores, playing into the vanity of the upper middle class. On the other hand, celebration of the American counter culture, especially African-American music and hair

¹⁴⁰Kiflu, The Generation pp. 46-48.

style, was seen positively as a form of silent revolt against political authority and upper class social sensibility, hence its popularity among youth radicals.

The miniskirt uproar can also be seen as signalling the transition from petty politics to organized group action. Earlier manifestations of political militancy, that were typically aired through individual essays and campus editorials, had, by 1968, coalesced into a collective expression. In fact, the miniskirt riot came in the wake of another momentous student protest outside the British embassy, this time in opposition to White Hall's complacent foreign policy toward the white supremacist regime of Rhodesia.¹⁴¹

A close examination of contemporary international events shows Ethiopian student activism was not an isolated phenomenon. From the "cultural revolution" in China to the anti-Soviet uprising in Czechoslovakia and to the black power movement in the United States, college campuses had become the breeding ground of youth unrest in the late sixties. For the campus-based anti-war movements in America and France, the year 1968 was particularly critical. In Paris, students' anti-establishment uprising forced De Gaulle's government to disband the National Assembly and call for a new parliamentary election. In the United States, the mysterious

¹⁴¹Balsvik, Haile Selassie's Students pp. 210-11.

assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King exacerbated political tensions almost to a breaking point, sparking urban racial riots and violent anti-war protests. Similarly, the late sixties and early seventies were remembered as years of student martyrdom. In the summer of 1968, confrontation between the French students and the police resulted in the loss of lives. Tilahun Gizaw, the president of University Students' Union of Addis Ababa, USUAA, was shot and killed by government security in December 1969. A year later, in Ohio's Ken State campus four students were killed and several other protesters wounded by the army's resort to lethal force.

In terms of actual causes, Ethiopian student malaise had little in common with student grievances from the wealthier nations. Moreover, European and American youngsters knew little about Ethiopia, while, on the other hand, Ethiopians emulated the political rhetoric of the civil rights movement or even of the more militant Black Panthers. Despite sporadic individual contacts, there were no organized Ethio-American inter-racial student links. Yet, in both societies, campus radicals traversed parallel paths in the way they articulated student anti-government discontents and in the way the authorities responded. In this respect, the fashion show fiasco not only manifested Ethiopian cultural nationalism, but it also reflected the anti-establishment and

anti-elitist characteristics of the overseas youth movements. What can be inferred from these similarities is the complexity of the Ethiopian students' movement and the need to study it from national, continental and international perspectives.

Ideological Splits Between Ethiopian Students and their African Counterparts

There existed a group of students at HSIU, mainly those from other African countries, whose political views did not conform with that of the Ethiopian radicals. A few of these students gained campus-wide recognition as regular contributors to News and Views. Some wrote informative essays about their countries' histories and political developments, while the more critical of them spoke against the excesses of the post-independence politicians whom they accused of resorting to either outright despotism or one-party rule.¹⁴² In certain instances, the NV editor, a Tanzanian, reprinted articles from other sources that were explicitly pro-Western. One such article described Joseph Mobutu's grab for power with the help of the CIA as signalling a positive start for the war-torn Congo. "Mobutu, age 35, is capable, hardworking,

¹⁴²Jeremiah Muthomi, "Where is Africa Going?" NV November 20, 1964; George Kandawire, "Independence: Boon or Bomb," NV December 4, 1964.

popularly incorruptible, dedicated to his country," the piece stated. It described his temperament as "pro-Belgian, pro-French, faintly pro-British, cautiously pro-American but most of all pro-Congolese."¹⁴³

By the time of Nkrumah's deposition from power through a military coup in February 1966, opposite ideological spectrums were evident among the politically active campus groups in Ethiopia. One group harbored anti-Western sentiments and regarded Nkrumah's removal from office as uncalled for. The other group, less sympathetic to Nkrumah, held African leaders accountable for the continent's failure both politically and economically. Ethiopian students dominated the former view and their foreign counterparts the latter.

In an essay published a week after Nkrumah's flight to Guinea, Kebede Worke, a prelaw student, described the ex-Ghanian leader as "one of the architects of African unity" and "a never to be forgotten fighter of freedom."¹⁴⁴ "Despite his absence from power," rejoined another Ethiopian student referring to Nkrumah, "pan-Africanism would live like the ideas of John Locke and Rousseau and must not be weakened."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³"The Congo New Man," NV January 11, 1966.

¹⁴⁴Kebede Worke, "Who is Next?" NV March 3, 1966.

¹⁴⁵Haile-Mariam Goshu, "Why Did They Walk Out?" NV March

Jeremiah Muthomi, a third year student of political science, disagreed. The Kenyan national described Nkrumah as a leader of "indispensable pretensions." Despite his lip service to the concept of unity, Nkrumah was a classic dictator who built a personality cult around himself: Nkrumahism. "As to whether he really was one of the architects of the OAU," Muthomi argued, "history will tell why he was against the establishment of the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa."¹⁴⁶

Implicit in these opposite opinions was the ideological divide between the Ethiopian and the foreign students. As recipients of Government scholarships, the African contributors to the NV were careful as not to offend the host country. Their writings, however outspoken against other continental figures, did not attack the West nor question the role of an absolutist monarch in a modern age. The Ethiopian students may not have written overtly about Haile Selassie, but felt freer to take positions on international issues even if such positions directly antagonized Haile Selassie's foreign policy. It thus made sense for the young radicals like Kebede to side with Nkrumah, Haile Selassie's pan-African nemesis, while the opposite was true of the

14, 1966.

¹⁴⁶Jeremiah Muthomi, "Nkrumah the Man," NV March 14, 1966.

scholarship students.

A commonly held belief in connection with the above point is that Ethiopian student radicalism owed its origins to influences from the foreign matriculants. According to Jesman and Kiflu, the "seeds of anti-dynastic sentiments" in Ethiopia were sown not so much by communist agents as by the scholarship students.¹⁴⁷ A close perusal of NV shows the misguided nature of the above assumption, for Ethiopian contributors consistently entertained more radical views than their foreign counterparts. This is by no means to discount the latter's influence. Contact with the scholarship students helped encourage a more cosmopolitan atmosphere among Ethiopian students, which in turn countervailed the forces of narrow nationalism. the exposure gave Ethiopians a more wholesome understanding of themselves as Africans and also made them evaluate comparatively their country's socio-economic conditions in a continental context.

However, the foreign student factor was only the final topping. Ethiopian student radicalism was the natural culmination of changing psycho-political trends begun decades earlier. It embodied refinement and continuity of the militant tradition that had been set in motion by the anti-fascist patriots in the thirties, and by popular anti-

¹⁴⁷Czeslaw Jesman, The Ethiopian Paradox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 71. Also see Kiflu Tadesse, Generation p. 35.

government martyrs in the forties and fifties.

Seeing Haile Selassie's wartime flight to England as a sign of cowardice, Belay Zeleke, a popular anti-Italian patriot from the province of Gojjam, had refused to pay homage to the freshly restored monarch, choosing to be hanged rather than compromise his anti-government stance. His example was emulated by the Columbian graduate Girmame Neway, the ideological mastermind behind the failed 1960 coup, who opted to commit suicide than surrender to government forces. The young activists of the sixties saw themselves as heirs to Girmame, Belay, and other like-minded martyrs, including Girmame's older brother, Mengistu, commander of the imperial body guard and leader of the foiled coup. The revolutionary spirit of the fallen heroes was remembered in slogans such as: "Better be a lion for a day and die than live the life of a lamb for a thousand days," "There is no solution without blood," and "What is sinful is to be ruled by despots, not to rise against them."¹⁴⁸

The Role of Literature as Consciousness-Raiser

The students' pan-African consciousness was also inspired and influenced by a select group of national intellectuals whose writings reflected a continental

¹⁴⁸Cited in Bahru, Modern History of Ethiopia p. 214.

preoccupation. Girmame himself wrote his political science master's thesis in the mid-fifties on colonial land tenure policy in Kenya. Girmame's pan-African thesis was followed by Abera Jembere's Ityopya, Hagere Tesfa (Ethiopia, a Beacon of Hope). Published in 1961 as independent Africa's future still loomed bright and promising, Abera's booklet situated Ethiopian history in a wider pan-African context.¹⁴⁹

Even novels such as Fikir Eske Mekabir, (Love Unto the Grave), which had a national audience in mind, carried subtle pan-African themes. Haddis Alemayehu's 1965 masterpiece work was a daring commentary on the dark side of Ethiopian feudalism, a delicate subject that writers often chose to repress rather than confront headlong. Fikir Eske Mekabir's exposition on slavery and class discrimination, presented in a tragic setting of two youths falling in love but could not marry because of class differences, played an important role in the conscientization of students. Its reanimation of feudal power relations, namely, the contrast between the destitute peasantry and the landed aristocracy, provided a humbling introspection to the urban readers. The presence of slave characters in the novel also revived one of the horrors of the Ethiopian society in the not-so-distant past. A major protagonist in this connection was Gudu Kasa, Kasa the wise

¹⁴⁹Abera Jembere, Ityopya, Hagere Tesfa (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam, 1953 EC).

fool, on whom Haddis bestowed qualities of enlightenment and self confidence. Although of noble birth, Kasa rebelled against the system by marrying a slave girl, coming across to the reader as a model national and pan-African hero, who chose to rise above class and petty ethnic squabbles.¹⁵⁰

Fikir Eske Mekabir, the most widely-read Amharic novel, became the trailblazer of modern Ethiopian literature. Two important writers whose works gained recognition in the sixties included Mengistu Lemma and Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin.¹⁵¹ Mengistu made his debut with his Yalacha Gabcha (Marriage of Unequals), a satirical novel about the clash between modernism and traditional social values. Tsegaye's English play, Oda Oak Oracle, was set in pre-colonial Africa, where one's social life was circumscribed by religion, social taboos, and communal loyalty.¹⁵² Collision of Altars, a sequel to Oda Oak Oracle came out in 1977, in which the triple heritage of the Axumite civilization--African, Islamic, and Judeo-Christian-- were reenacted.¹⁵³

Although the English language prevented many local readers from appreciating the full depth of Tsegaye's

¹⁵⁰Molvaer, Black Lions pp. 146-47.

¹⁵¹Ibid pp. 269-85.

¹⁵²Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, Oda Oak Oracle: A Legend of Black Peoples (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

¹⁵³Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, Collision of Altars: A Conflict of the Ancient Red Sea Gods (London: R. Collings, 1977).

literary complexity, it nonetheless made him his country's best known writer abroad. Tsegaye, who spoke both French and English fluently, and also wrote several plays and poems in Amharic, represented Ethiopia in various African and international literary conferences. Contacts with pan-Africanist intellectuals, among them the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop, made Tsegaye a leading proponent of Afrocentrism. "Poet, playwright, director, research historiographer and anthropologist in the art of black-Ethio-Egyptian pre-classical and classical antiquities" was how Molvaer characterized Tsegaye's multifarious professional pursuits.¹⁵⁴

Haddis, Mengistu and Tsegaye, together with younger proteges such as Balu Girma and Berhanu Zerihun, were seen as the liberated intellectuals of their time. Their works challenged the elite's assumption about class, race and ethnicity, and also spoke against oppressive social customs. Their themes, mostly of national and continental relevance, struck a delicate balance between squeamish provincialism and excessive Westernization. Belonging to the latter camp was, for example, Artist Afework Tekle, whose works the students argued lacked a genuine African manifestation. The critics often cited one of Afework's popular drawings, in which the celebration of noble birth and Mediterranean physical

¹⁵⁴Molvaer, Black Lions p. 269.

features seemed the primary motif, even though most Ethiopians were darker complected and eked out a hard living.¹⁵⁵

On the other hand, the students responded favorably, almost out of instinct, to such simple and straightforward poems as Mengistu Lemma's "Basha Ashebir be America," for their direct attacks on upper class racial pretensions. Written in the singular first person, "Basha Ashebir be America," (Captain Ashebir in America), bore certain universal truths as it related to the experience of many African and Asian dignitaries in the United States before the civil rights reforms. While on a diplomatic mission to America, the narrator, Ashebir, stops at a tavern for a drink. Feeling unwelcomed by a hostile-looking owner, Ashebir strolls to the pastry shop next door, only to meet the disapproving gaze of the same white proprietor. The latter angrily demands that the guest leave the premises immediately, but the unassuming Ashebir holds his ground. The brawl turns into a fist fight, resulting in the customer's arrest by the police for trespassing the "whites only" sign. The naive Ashebir tries to explain to the police that his racial pedigree is as pure as that of any white. However black and wooly-haired, he descends from the blood of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and should not be taken for an

¹⁵⁵Balsvik, Haile Selassie's Students pp. 209-10.

ordinary black. His claim of an aristocratic lineage does not so much as raise an eyebrow. Only then does it dawn on Ashebir that all blacks are the same regardless of ethnic or class background. The poem concludes with the narrator reconciling with himself and accepting his African identity.¹⁵⁶

Pop Music and the Ethio-Atlantic Fusion

Even more than literature, pop culture impacted the transformation of national consciousness, for the obvious reason that the latter had a direct appeal to the masses and not just to the educated elite. Music and movies constituted important aspects of popular culture, but in the case of Ethiopia the former was more relevant because of the pervasive presence of the radio and, rather recently, of the cassette player. Continental influence on Ethiopian pop music has been a recent phenomenon, a development from the nineties. By contrast, Jazz and Blues not only remained popular among Ethiopians for several decades, but also shaped the evolution of the local music. Pop music is, in this context, the catalyst through which Africa-derived but Western-processed artistic sophistication was introduced to

¹⁵⁶Amsale Aklilu, *Achir Ye Ityopya Sine-Tsihuf Tarik* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1976 EC), pp. 208-14.

Ethiopia and Ethiopian national consciousness.

Although Ethiopian exposure to African-American music went back to the early thirties, the modernization of Ethiopian music did not start until the forties. In an attempt to promote Addis Ababa's cosmopolitan image, the post-war Ethiopian government sponsored various projects, among them the establishment of several theater houses and military brass bands. Having gained recognition for his composition of the Ethiopian national anthem, the Armenian Kevork Nalbandian, together with his son Nersis and several other Europeans, was appointed to train the first generation of Ethiopian musicians.¹⁵⁷ The year 1947 marked a turning point with the introduction of the "first large dance band," sponsored by the Municipal Office of Addis Ababa. Little is known about the band's mentors, but it is possible that the Nalbandians and the small African-American community in the capital were consulted for some input. "The formation of the band, the musical instruments, the performance approaches, and the musical repertory were imitative of the black American jazz styles of the United States," writes Ashenafi Kebede, Ethiopia's first ethno-musicologist. "In fact, when Wilber de Paris, a master American jazzman, and his New Orleans Jazz Band performed later in Ethiopia in 1956, he

¹⁵⁷Ashenafi Kebede, "Musical Innovation and Acculturation in Ethiopian Culture," African Urban Studies 6, (1979), pp. 77-87.

said 'Ethiopian jazzmen are the best musicians that we have seen so far in Africa. They are promising handlers of jazz instruments.'"¹⁵⁸

Compared to the roaring sixties, the music scene in Addis Ababa in the fifties was that of relative calm. Bars and nightclubs no doubt continued to proliferate. But politics, even more so than modern music, permeated into every vein of social life. For a while, idealism and leisure seemed to share a common platform, with bars and nightclubs scrambling for politically expressive pan-African names. Such popular spots in the capital included the East Africa Bar, Uhuru Bar, Kenya Bar, Kilimanjaro Bar and the Harambe Hotel. Other clubs were either named after one of the African heroes, as in Patrice Lumumba Bar and Jomo Kenyatta Bar, or simply bore the name "Africa" as in Africa Hotel, Africa NightClub and African Unity Bar.¹⁵⁹

Although Ethiopians had begun to specialize in Western musical instruments under European instructors since the late forties, their training prepared them either for the military bands or for one of the government-run cultural establishments. In other words, there was no commercial music in Ethiopia until the late sixties, which meant that

¹⁵⁸Ibid p. 82.

¹⁵⁹Richard Pankhurst, "Ethiopia and Africa: The Historical Aspect," Ethiopia Observer 8, 1 (1964), p. 8.

nightclubs had to make due with imported LPs or, in few instances, hire their own bands. Fortunately, the interlude was only temporary.

The establishment of the UNECA and the OAU headquarters in Ethiopia transformed Addis Ababa into an international hub. Jazz, Soul, Rhythm and Blues made inroads into the once sleepy capital, posing both a challenge and inspiration to the government sponsored orchestras. The inspiration was felt strongly among the more animated group of musicians, who sought to shape their professional destinies as well as the destiny of modern Ethiopian music outside government control. The challenge went to Amha Eshete who, contrary to the 1948 imperial edict, which made government the sole authority over the production and distribution of records, founded an independent record label. Amha Records, the name of the label, provided Ethiopian music the long-awaited commercial outlet, even if the actual sales for a single hit hardly surpassed a thousand copies.¹⁶⁰

Commercialization did not bring instant riches, but it attracted young talents such as Mulatu Astatqe and Girma Beyene. Girma as a vocalist adopted a more relaxed singing style that was less constrained by the pentatonic scale. Mulatu as a composer and arranger incorporated Jazz and Afro-

¹⁶⁰For an interesting account of the evolution of Ethiopian commercial music, see Buda Music, Ethiopiques Vol. 1.

Latin rhythms, giving Ethiopian music a more syncretic Afro-Atlantic flavor.¹⁶¹

Mulatu, Ethiopia's influential pop artist, was born in Jimma, a district in southwestern Ethiopia, in 1943. A close relation of Ras Mesfin Sileshi, one of the wealthiest aristocrats in the country, he was sent to London at the age of seventeen to study engineering. Taken in by the rebellious mood of the sixties, Mulatu chose to pursue music, specializing in piano, clarinet and harmony. He began his musical career in Frank Holder's London-based Calypso band, and for a time played the bongos in Edmundo Ross's "Latino big band." Sometime in the mid-sixties, the eccentric Ethiopian moved to the more vivacious New York City, where he assembled a group of African-American and Puerto Rican musicians, soon known as the "Ethiopian Quintet." The group's LP, entitled "Afro-Latin Soul," was not a commercial success, but nonetheless demonstrated Mulatu's potential as an original composer and arranger.¹⁶²

Returning to Ethiopia about the same time that Amha's label went to business, Mulatu through his extensive exposure to Western music exerted a revolutionary influence on local artists. Given his elitist background, he was also best situated to dispel the conventional stereotype of music as a

¹⁶¹Ethiopiques Vol. 8.

¹⁶²Ethiopiques Vol. 4.

low cast profession. Mulatu, one of whose career highlights included a performance with Duke Ellington at the Addis Ababa Hilton Hotel in 1970, became the bridge between Ethiopian music and its New World counterpart. He pioneered an Ethio-Atlantic fusion known as Ethio-Jazz, and his innovation was instantly picked up by the newly created independent bands.¹⁶³

By the early seventies, Ethiopian pop music had reached a golden age, the age of "swinging Addis." One Amharic hit from this period was known as "Calypso," while the better known "Twist," no doubt inspired by Sam Cook's famous hit of the same name, remained a favorite choice in nightclubs. Motown grooves satisfied the youths' Western palate, but the domestic taste was met by bands such as the "Equators" and "Soul Ekos," the best practitioners of Ethio-American fusion.¹⁶⁴

Similarly, no singer captured the fervor of the Ethiopian swing-mania better than Alemayehu Eshete, whose distinct musical trademark lay in his incorporation of the Soul genre. Although his dashing appearance on stage and pompadour hair style made him known to some as the "Abyssinian Elvis," it was the adoption of James Brown's vocal technique in such songs as "Chiro Adari Negn," (I live

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ethiopiques Vol. 1.

by my sweat), that made Alemayehu the national icon of the swing era.¹⁶⁵ Suggestive of the sixties preoccupation with the issues of social justice and racial equality, many of Alemayehu's songs dealt with timely themes such as poverty, social alienation, greed, and political oppression. One of Alemayehu's popular hits from this period included "Tikur Gissila," (the black panther), which was a tribute to the freedom fighters in southern Rhodesia, later Zimbabwe.

Armed with pistols and machine guns, the black panthers are up in action. Armed with pistols and machine guns, the black panthers are up in action. . . . White snake once ruled the land with bully and intimidation. While it used the land to fatten itself and its race, it bit and killed many a defenseless panther. . . . "Why do Africans have to be treated as beasts? Why is their blood shed in vain? Can there be any rational for that?" For raising such questions panthers were hanged. . . . At last, panthers have risen up in arms, enough of their woes and bitterness. For they know if the white snake is not quickly destroyed from the head, they would all be victims of its deadly venom. Armed with pistols and machine guns, the black panthers are up in action. Armed with pistols and machine guns, the black panthers are up in action.¹⁶⁶

Since Ian Smith's "unilateral declaration of independence" in 1965, the Ethiopian government had been under extreme pressure from the students to adopt a more militant anti-colonial posture. In March 1968, about 2700 college and high school students marched to the OAU

¹⁶⁵"Chiro Adari Negn," Ethiopiques Vol. 8.

¹⁶⁶Translation from Amharic into English by the author.

headquarters demanding that force be used to topple Smith's outlaw regime.¹⁶⁷ The students' bravado did not produce an immediate result, but nonetheless justified Ethiopia's covert logistical support for the southern African freedom fighters. One such support included the hosting of Zimbabwean refugees, one of whom incidentally joined the Soul Ekos as the band's lead guitarist.¹⁶⁸ Ethiopian moral backup for the freedom fighters was also evident in the aforementioned "Tikur Gissila," whose role as consciousness-raiser surpassed the effect of the print media. "Tikur Gissila" and several other less known ballads not only popularized the anti-colonial struggle south of the Zambezi, but also exemplified the intimate connection between art and contemporary political sentiment, hence the significance of pop music as a catalyst of pan-African awareness.

A central theme shared among musicians, writers and top government officials at the helms of the imperial era was, thus, the transformation of Ethiopian provincialism into a more cosmopolitan and continental identity. Although the Marxist Derg kept a reasonable equilibrium between the Africa-centered political gravitation and the call for a universal proletarian solidarity, artistic creativity became

¹⁶⁷Balsvik, Haile Selassie's Students pp. 210-11.

¹⁶⁸His name is given as Andrew Wilson in Ethiopiques Vol. 8.

one dimensional after 1974. Independent cultural innovation faced repression or, in some cases, persecution, under the military junta. Many of the younger musicians, including the producer Amha Eshete, fled to Europe and North America as refugees. The Red Terror, most of whose victims were urban youth and intellectuals, may have stifled the burst of cultural creativity, but could not wish away the growing taste in Western hip-hop. To make up for the relative stagnation in Ethiopian music, popular attention was diverted to the Voice of America's Amharic radio program, where pre-1974 songs were freely played side by side with latest American hits, or to imported albums such as Bob Marley, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, and Boney M, to mention a few. The Walias, the Ethio Stars, and the Roha Band also rose from the ashes of the Soul Ekos and the Equators about this time, but without some of the earlier best talents and under heavy government censorship.¹⁶⁹

By the late eighties, the epicenter of Ethiopian music industry had moved to North America in response to the growing Ethiopian emigre population there. While a sad commentary on cultural brain drain, relocation to North America gave the artists access to state-of-the-art recording

¹⁶⁹Francis Falceto, "Ethiopian groove: Welcome to the Land of Wax and Gold," in World Music, The Rough Guide, eds. Simon Broughton, Mark Ellington, David Muddyman and Richard Rillo. (London: The Rough Guides, 1994), pp. 298-305.

facilities, politically unincumbered freedom of expression, and the opportunity to rub shoulders with kindred spirits from Africa and the Caribbean. One of the success stories among the U.S.-based Ethiopian singers during this period was Aster Awoke, the Aritha Franklin of Ethiopian pop. Although "Swinging Addis" was a distant memory by now, Aster's incorporation of hip-hop and rap ignited anew the Ethio-Atlantic fusion craze. Her exemplar inspired several younger artists, among them Dawit Melesse and Chachi Tadesse, whose hybrid style borrowed greatly from Zairian Soukous and Trinidadian Soca.¹⁷⁰

The Chicago-based Dallol group also made its debut in the late eighties as the backup band for Ziggy and the Melody Makers. Among their collaboration works with the Melody Makers included the grammy winning Conscious Party album, which sold more than 500,000 copies worldwide. In a time when Ethiopia's international image had sunk bottom low because of famine and civil war, the Marleys boldly identified with Ethiopia by injecting Amharic lyrics in their songs. "Dream of Home," one of their sensational hits, began with a recitation of "Abatachin Hoy," the Lord's Prayer in Amharic. The exotic lyrics became the group's distinct trademark, so much so that "Abatachin Hoy" remained the opening chant in many of the Marley's concerts even after their official

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

breakup with the Dallol in the early nineties.¹⁷¹

Dallol's international success added to Reggae's already growing popularity in Ethiopia, its rhythm and race-conscious theme evident in many recent Amharic songs. This distinctly West Indian genre became to the urban counter culture of the nineties what Soul and Jazz had been to the student movement in the sixties. Thanks to the green-gold-red tricolor, even the most provincially-minded Ethiopian was now aware of such distant realities as Jamaica, Rasta and Bob Marley. Reggae's message about world peace and international brotherhood also caught the attention of the war-wary urban youths, who now looked to the imperial sixties and early seventies as a period of social progress and relative peace.

¹⁷¹"Dream of Home," Conscious Party (Virgin Records, 1988).

Chapter IV
Movement of Jah People

"Open your eyes and look within
Are you satisfied with the life you're living?
We know where we're going; we know where we're from
We're leaving Babylon, we're going to our fatherland."¹

Demographically, the Caribbean black population represents a small segment of the Afro-Atlantic world. This fact notwithstanding, there has been a conspicuous presence of West Indian immigrants in Ethiopia since the late 1920s--the Fords in the thirties, the Talbots and the Pipers in the forties and the fifties, and a continuous trickle of Rastafarian pilgrims to Shashemene since the late 'sixties. This chapter examines the historic presence of Western blacks in Ethiopia, giving particular attention to post-war racial ties.

The Pre-War Period

Africa's image as the black man's refuge from slavery

¹Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Exodus, Movement of Jah People." Exodus (Island Records, 1977).

and racism in the West inspired a series of repatriation schemes. Between the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, tens of thousands of American and Caribbean ex-slaves were resettled in Sierra Leone and Liberia with the help of British and American abolitionists. After a slip to dormancy in the latter half of the 19th century, the resettlement drive was revived by Marcus Garvey and his United Negro Improvement Association in the early 20th century. In order to implement Garvey's back-to-Africa motto, ships were acquired and settlement land procured from the Liberian government by the UNIA. But the plan failed in part because it lacked sufficient financial capital, and in part because of political as well as personal frictions between the UNIA leadership and the Americo-Liberian power elite.²

With the fallout between Garvey and the Liberian government, and with the rest of Africa under the yoke of European colonialism, Ethiopia captured the attention of some as a possible alternative for repatriation. Between the late-1920s and the mid-1930s, the far off nation became a haven for scores of black Zionists and fortune seekers. The actual number of these race visionaries was negligible, but the combined effects of Ethiopia's aura and their pioneering courage made migration a popular ppreoccupation among

²Stein, World of Marcus Garvey chs. 6 and 11.

thousands of Afro-Americans and West Indians.

Explaining New World black love affair with Ethiopia requires an investigation into the push and pull factors. The pull factors, as have been shown by Scott and Harris, center on racial romanticism and pan-African idealism. However, although the two authors discuss racism and poverty as obvious push factors behind the African-American emigration, they fail to locate their thesis in a larger historical context of the period.

A recent work by Winston James shows that Garvey's call for the return to Africa reflected larger mass movement in the Americas. In the United States, the great migration resulted in the northward movement of millions of Southern blacks in search of better living conditions. Farther south, the building of the Panama Canal triggered a large influx of West Indian workers to Central America. Even greater was the exodus to North America by the islanders in anticipation of higher wages and a better chance for self-refinement. About 150,000 Caribbean immigrants disembarked on U.S. shores between 1899 and 1937, with an annual arrival of about 12,000 persons at the height of the influx in the early 1920s.³

The 1924 immigration act allocated a two-percent annual quota for every nationality entering the U.S., a percentage

³Winston James, Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in America, 1930-1932 (New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 7, 12 and 15-16.

based on the 1890 demographic census. Since few non-Westerners had migrated to America before the 1890s, the act was meant to screen out the non-Nordic races. The immigration restriction act gave American racism a de facto legitimacy, and the rising xenophobia sparked a process of Reverse migration to the West Indies. In reaction to the great depression and heightened domestic racial tensions, many African-Americans also entertained the possibility of moving elsewhere in search of better socio-economic opportunities. It is in this context that migration to Ethiopia provided an alternative other than going back to the islands or sticking it out in the States.⁴

In short, two symbiotic factors made migration to Ethiopia tempting during the 1930s. First, a culture of high mobility, very characteristic of the period, created a psychology of adventure and fortune seeking, hence the fascination with the distant Northeast Africa. Second, the idealization of Ethiopia as Africa's Japan, rumors of a settlement scheme near Lake Tana, as well as the pomp and pageantry of Haile Selassie's coronation in 1930, whipped up a nationalistic fervor of messianic proportions.⁵ The actual number of those wishing to settle in the Horn was perhaps in the thousands. But only a select few--the most determined and

⁴Ibid pp. 12-13.

⁵Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 179-80.

resourceful--reached the land of their dream, while the majority found logistics and the long sea voyage prohibitive.⁶

According to Jerrold Robbins, a contemporary eyewitness account, two-thirds of the hundred-and-fifty or so Americans in Ethiopia in the early thirties were black immigrants. Robbins added that they brought with them fanciful schemes such as "building roads, shooting monkeys for their skins, opening hair straightening parlors, caring for the teeth of the natives, teaching them jazz and spirituals, introducing barbecued pork, and opening cabarets and movie houses."⁷

Carleton Coon, another contemporary traveler, also wrote of his encounter with two Afro-American singers in Ethiopia. Of the half dozen or so nightclubs in Addis Ababa before the war, the most popular among the foreign clientele was the Corsican-owned Tambourine. The Tambourine was the first club in Ethiopia where the color bar was introduced, albeit under the pretext of "Club Priv'e," instead of the more conventional "whites only" sign. Besides the two Somali waiters, the only other non-Europeans allowed into the private club were its two black American musicians. The minstrels, whom Carleton Coon identified, rather

⁶Ibid p. 181.

⁷Jerrold Robbins, "Americans in Ethiopia," Mercury 29 (May-August 1933), p. 63.

pejoratively, as Mrs. Chocolate and Rabbi Smith, were the African-American Eudora Paris and the Barbadian Rabbi Arnold Ford. "Mrs. Chocolate commandeered, whenever possible, the latest phonograph records to arrive in Addis Ababa," Coon wrote of Mrs. Paris. "Their owners gladly surrendered them, for it meant new music in the Tambourine. She used to listen to them attentively for two or three renditions, and would then dash to the piano to improvise her own interpretation. From then on Addis Ababa would hear it, until more records were forthcoming."⁸

For the colored performers, popularity did not mean acceptance by the larger expatriate community. Such was the racial divide at the Tambourine that the white patrons knew little more than the distorted hearsays about their colored entertainers. "Some say that her husband was a Jamaica Negro," Coon described Paris mockingly, "and that she came to Ethiopia thinking it was a black man's paradise; others maintain that he was a Congo native, and that she went to the Congo to report his death to his own people, after which she sang and played her way across Africa to Addis Ababa."⁹

Mr. Smith or, rather, Rabbi Ford, is also portrayed as a gifted, yet out of place character. "Settling down with four wives less dusky, one presumes, than himself, he made

⁸Coon, Measuring Ethiopia pp. 131-32.

⁹Ibid p. 132.

himself reasonably comfortable in his new surroundings. When, however, he leans over his strings to pluck out 'Old Black Joe' or 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,' the discerning observer may observe a nostalgic gleam in his large and expressive eyes, and may surmise that he would willingly exchange his four consorts for one night in Harlem."¹⁰

There is little reason to doubt that at least the larger portion of American residents in Ethiopia before the Italian invasion were indeed black returnees. Scott identifies more than 20 immigrants by name and occupation, and his list is by no means exhaustive.¹¹ Harris also cites several letters of correspondence between the American consul in Addis Ababa and the State Department in Washington whose contents attests to the presence of "about a hundred blacks from the United States and the West Indies." Harris in fact noted a deliberate effort to discourage the growing racial trickle to Africa. Addison Southard, the American representative in Addis Ababa, found the black newcomers "'troublesome and often impecunious American negroes of whom the most objectionable appear to be British West Indian Garveyites with American naturalization.'" The consul complained that the newcomers not only expected the legation's financial help, but that they also spread negative

¹⁰Ibid p. 133.

¹¹Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 179-91.

rumors about the legation and its racial attitudes. Southard recommended that measures be taken to stop the racial influx to Ethiopia, even if it meant depriving the would-be travelers of passport or visa issuances.¹²

Reports of such sorts prompted officials in Washington to advise against further migration to Africa. In January 1932, the U.S. State Department issued a press release warning all Americans not to migrate to Ethiopia, because of the lack of job opportunities there."¹³ The effectiveness of the dissuasive campaign is unclear, however, for "the Peace Movement of Ethiopia" was founded in Chicago later in the same year to carry out "a vigorous back-to-Africa campaign." In general, migration seems to have remained a popular subject among Garveyites and black Zionists throughout the thirties, even if lack of financial and political support prevented its implementation.¹⁴

As late as 1939, there was an aborted effort by a group in Chicago to launch a march in Washington in support of Senator Theodore G. Bilbo's "Negro Repatriation Bill." Of course, Bilbo was denounced by most blacks for his white supremacist ideology. But in the same way many Garveyites had turned a blind eye to their leader's endorsement of the Ku

¹²Harris, Reaction to War in Ethiopia pp. 14-15.

¹³Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race p. 188.

¹⁴Cronon, Black Moses,, p. 166.

Klux Klan for its anti-integrationist stance, there were some racial nationalists who embraced Bilbo's repatriation bill out of a sheer economic desperation.¹⁵

The Ethiopian Reality

Having established the myriad of contributing factors in favor of emigration--a culture of mobility, economic and racial pressures, escapism, vision and ingenuity--the next point of focus is the Ethiopian side of the response. Unfortunately, any effort toward a conclusive assessment of the pre-war black experience in Ethiopia is a rather futile exercise because of limited and often contradictory sources. The individuals' experience in Ethiopia, positive or negative, seemed to have been dictated not so much by Ethiopian attitudes as by their personal backgrounds: levels of education, types of skill, goals and expectations prior to migration.

Of the 23 or so immigrants identified by name in Scott's Sons of Sheba's Race are two doctors, two aviators, several teachers, three or four musicians, a fashion designer, an auto mechanic, a watch maker, and two carpenters. The physicians and the pilots, and possibly the teachers, were government recruits, while the rest arrived in

¹⁵Ibid.

Ethiopia on their own initiatives.¹⁶

There were obvious and genuine reasons why those with specialized skills were recruited by the government. Enlightened Ethiopian officials "understood that foreign blacks posed far less of a threat to Ethiopian security and sensitivities than did whites," writes Scott. "They reasoned that if skilled U.S. blacks would come to Ethiopia and become citizens, they would not have or display the arrogance and sense of superiority illy concealed by white men and women, who would probably retain their foreign nationality and with it their foreign prejudices." Thus, at a policy level, there was a preference for the type of black immigrants with relevant educational and technical expertise, whose presence would not only counter white influence on Ethiopia but would also inspire Ethiopian school-goers to higher academic pursuits.¹⁷

Ironically, those who left for Ethiopia on their own seem to have been the ones better fitted psychologically and physically for the rugged African lifestyle, while those who immigrated as government guests tended to stay for shorter durations. The government recruits thought of themselves as sojourners rather than as permanent settlers, the reverse being true with the self-sponsored and less educated

¹⁶Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race see ch. 15.

¹⁷Ibid p. 85.

immigrants, most of them of West Indian descent. The latter, mostly of humbler economic backgrounds, adjusted to the Ethiopian lifestyle better and quicker, as they had little incentive to look back to the New World.

Unlike the paid government recruits, many of the self-driven pre-war immigrants understood their return to Africa in nationalistic or Zionistic terms. Illustrative of this group is the experience of Rabbi Arnold Ford and his wife Mignon. Arnold Ford, a talented artist and composer from Barbados, had migrated to New York in 1912 where he joined UNIA's Liberty Hall as its music director. Following the collapse of the organization because of Garvey's imprisonment and subsequent deportation, the Barbadian became a convert to Judaism. A charismatic figure, he was recognized as Rabbi by Harlem's fledgling community of black Hebrews, a nationalist sect which sought association with the Ethiopian Jewry known as the Falasha or Bete-Israel.¹⁸

Ford arrived in Ethiopia in 1930, perhaps in time to witness Haile Selassie's historic coronation. If Ford's original plan was to join the Bete-Israelis in Gondar, logistics did not allow him to execute his intent. There is no record to verify Coon's portrait of Ford as a polygomist. To the contrary, while in Ethiopia he married Mignon Innes, a young Barbadian immigrant almost 30 years his junior. The

¹⁸Ibid pp. 181-82.

Fords and the aforementioned Paris remained the focal point of the emigre community in the capital, keeping themselves financially afloat as musical entertainers to the local aristocracy and the diplomatic community. Unfortunately, the Rabbi did not take too well to the highland environment, and he died in September 1935 at the age of 58.¹⁹

To a community threatened by an imminent war, the death of Ford came as a staggering blow. Whereas most of the immigrants returned to the United States because of the outbreak of hostilities, Ford's young widow, then already a mother of two, and her friend Alberta Thomas decided to stick it out in their adopted homeland.²⁰

In December 1941 the two founded the Bait Ouriel School, later renamed the Princess Zeneme-Work School in memory of one of Haile Selassie's deceased daughters. Before its confiscation by the Marxist government in the mid-seventies, the school, with funding from the government and foreign philanthropists, would grow to a campus of 600 students with a teaching staff of sixteen. Mignon Ford died in 1995, by then a well-known figure in international pan-Africanist circles as a result of her pioneering role in the

¹⁹Ibid pp. 182-84.

²⁰"Diamonds of the African World: Obituary of Mrs. Mignon Ford," Ethiopian Register February 1995.

development of modern education in Ethiopia.²¹

Of the government-invited black visitors before the war two stand out as the most memorable. The flamboyant Hubert Julian, the first black aviator in Ethiopia, arrived in Addis Ababa in May 1930, under Melaku's behest. Melaku did not know that the Trinidadian-born Harlemite, far from being a professional pilot, only held a students' license to fly. Inexperience did not prevent the Black Eagle from staging a successful aerial show and a classic parachute jump in Addis Ababa in preparation for the emperor's coronation fanfare. The dashing Harlemite remained a popular figure at least until the eve of the coronation day. The country owned three planes, the recently purchased Gypsy Moth being Tefari's most prized possession. Julian's unauthorized attempt to fly the new plane on the last day of rehearsal ended in a disastrous crash, a thirty percent depreciation of the entire royal fleet. Barely scathed by the accident, Julian left the country rather than face imprisonment for failure to obey orders. He returned to Ethiopia in 1935 as a wartime volunteer, but only to leave the country again on charges of misdemeanors, among them several unpaid debts to creditors and insubordination in the military.²²

²¹Ibid; also see Kenneth King's "Some Notes on Arnold Ford and New World Black Attitudes to Ethiopia," Journal of Ethiopian Studies 10 (January 1972), pp. 81-87.

²²Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 84-99.

John Robinson, Melaku's other recruit, was Julian's opposite, whose participation in the Ethiopian war effort earned him respect and admiration. In his role as the emperor's personal courier, Robinson flew military dispatches to the war front until a few weeks before the fall of the capital. Since Ethiopia had no air-force other than a squadron of outdated planes, he did not have the chance to take part in actual air combat. Nonetheless, his escapades into the war zone demanded great daring and much navigational dexterity lest he became an easy prey to enemy air fire. Elevated to the rank of captain by the Ethiopian government for his courageous service, the Brown Candor returned to Chicago where he was accorded a heroic welcome.²³

William Shack describes the pre-war migration to Ethiopia as a chapter in pan-African racial solidarity. A more critical appraisal of the subject shows that pan-African encounters in pre-war Northeast Africa were inconsequential in shaping or altering racial attitudes. Because the immigrants were still going through a period of adjustment when the Italian invasion broke out, they did not assimilate into the mainstream society. In any case, their size was too small to have affected Ethiopian racial sentiments one way or the other. Even in Addis Ababa, where the newcomers congregated, their social interaction with the host community

²³Ibid pp. 69-81.

was circumscribed by religious and language differences. Most Addis Ababans did not know about their overseas guests; and the few who did, manifested no uniform response. Individuals such as Kentiba Gebru Desta, Hakim Warqneh and Haile Selassie seem to have maintained positive contacts with the emigre community. There were also other members of the aristocracy who, having fallen prey to European racial hearsay, behaved negatively toward the newcomers.²⁴

John Robinson, the African-American war-time volunteer, observed firsthand the negative impact Europeans were having on intra-race relations between Ethiopians and their foreign cousins. "The white influence over here is very, very strong. Whites have poisoned the minds of the Ethiopians against Afro-Americans."²⁵ On the other hand, Afro-American immigrants also came with a preconceived notion about Africans which was both condescending and paternalistic. Robinson was as much critical of his compatriots' air of superiority as he was of the Ethiopians. What the "average Negro wants to do after he lands is to tell the emperor how to run his country," the airman wrote. "He comes here expecting to be honored because he is an American."²⁶

In other words, just as there were incidents of

²⁴Ibid ch. 15.

²⁵Ibid p. 189.

²⁶Ibid.

Ethiopian xenophobic manifestations, there were examples in which some of the black immigrants, either for selfish reasons or to make a living, played the European card. Paris and Ford saw the Tambourine as one place where their talents could be appreciated, even though the club's color-bar policy kept away the natives. The "whites only" club was eventually closed not due to the Afro-Americans' protest, but because of the Ethiopians' stubborn refusal to put up with such colonial nonsense. In fact the closure of the Tambourine is as dramatic as its short-lived history, and says much about the Ethiopians' defiant state of mind. Even the racist Coon could not hide his admiration for those unruly patriots responsible for the demise of the Jim Crow nightclub.

Like all proud peoples, the Ethiopians took this ill. On several occasions they tried to crash the gate in twos and threes, attired in their most spotless evening garments, but each time they were refused entrance, or at best permitted a quick drink at the bar. One fateful evening we saw a squadron of twenty or more intrepid young Ethiopians, most of them connected in one way or another with the government, enter en masse. They demanded the right to sit in the inner room, and to be served and amused. This privilege the proprietor denied them. After much talking, blows ensued; persons holding responsible posts discreetly disappeared, and finally the invaders took their departure. The triumph of the "Club Priv'e was short-lived, however, for within an hour a company of His Majesty's soldiers arrived, ejected the revelers, and closed the establishment permanently.²⁷

In general, the immigrants' stay in pre-war Ethiopia

²⁷Ibid pp. 135-36.

was too brief to have had lasting significance on the host society. Their Ethiopian experience, however, did make a difference on public perception back home. After returning to the United States in the eve of the war, the ex-emigres helped assuage racial misgivings about Ethiopians, misgivings that were perpetuated by white writers but later picked up by the black press.

A controversial topic in the black media during the mid and late thirties was the question of Ethiopian racial identity. Did the Ethiopians really see themselves as Africans? If so, did they accept foreign blacks as racial brothers? Did they care? The more convincing answers to these questions came naturally from the pre-war travelers, many of whom joined the thick of the anti-fascist battle back in America.

Dorthy Bayen, whose stay in Ethiopia with her husband Melaku had been interrupted by the Italian invasion, rejected as absurd allegations about Ethiopian racial chauvinism. As the wife of the noted Ethiopian, the African-American woman was in a better position than most immigrants to learn about Ethiopian social and cultural mores. "Mrs. Bayen was profuse in her praise of the way she and her son were accepted by all classes of the Ethiopian society," observed Scott, based on an interview with her. "'I was received kindly by both the

royal family and the common people.'"²⁸ Back in the States Mrs. Bayen surfaced as one of the major female activists in the pro-Ethiopian crusade through her editorial involvement in the Voice of Ethiopia.²⁹

Of all the pre-war travelers to Ethiopia, the Jamaican-born J. A. Rogers stood out as the most widely-read--if not the most influential--pro-Ethiopian pamphleteer. Based on a personal interview with Haile Selassie and a firsthand impression of the country, Rogers wrote what was perhaps the most widely circulated pro-Ethiopian tract of the time. In the Real Facts about Ethiopia, the gifted writer explained that Ethiopians saw themselves as a "nation" and not as a "race" of people. They refused to be called "negroes," not because they denied their blackness, but because the word had a pejorative implication to slavery. Otherwise, according to Rogers, Ethiopians saw Africans of the New World as racial brothers and they extended warm welcome to those already in their midst. "Aframericans in Ethiopia will be well received provided that they do not go there with airs of superiority."³⁰

Rogers' observation was right. In Ethiopia, The black newcomers were initiated into a society where class and

²⁸Ibid p. 197.

²⁹"Bond without Blood," see ch. 3.

³⁰Rogers, Real Facts about Ethiopia p. 30.

ethnicity mattered more than race. By Western standards many immigrants eked a rough hand-to-mouth existence in a country where jobs were scarce, industries and modern amenities unheard of. By local measurements, however, these newcomers were better off than the average Ethiopian and some even prospered. The singer Eudora Paris, who doubled as a fashion designer for some of the aristocratic families, maintained an affluent lifestyle with "a large house in Addis Ababa and ample servants to help maintain its upkeep."³¹ Returning to New York in 1936 with an adopted Ethiopian son, Pares became a leading anti-war activist and spoke regularly on the EWF platforms.³² Another sojourner who did relatively well in Ethiopia was the aforementioned Robinson. Back in the U.S., Robinson became the magnet for the pro-Ethiopian rally in Chicago. Despite his resentment of Europeans' growing influence in Ethiopia, the airman found his stay in the country rewarding enough to have returned to it after the war.

Post-war migration

The post-war years being a period of economic boom and greater job opportunities, few Americans felt compelled to

³¹Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race p. 184.

³²Scott, Sons of Sheba's Race pp. 184-85.

emigrate in the 1940s. Conversely, the Interest in repatriation to Africa dropped to rock bottom, with less than a score of blacks leaving for Ethiopia. Ironically, this was when immigrants had a bigger role to play in war-torn Northeast Africa, for post-war reconstruction depended greatly on outside expertise.

As in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the post-war Ethiopian government took the initiative in opening its doors for skilled immigrants. By now, a direct liaison had been established between the Ethiopian government and a segment of the African-American community, making the recruitment process more selective. In 1943, while on an official visit to Washington, The Ethiopian vice minister of finance, Yilma Deressa, contacted William Leo Hansberry, the wartime pro-Ethiopian activist and the founder of Ethiopian Research Council. The effort resulted in the consideration of several individuals as potential employees in Ethiopia.

Of those, only less than a score actually arrived in Addis Ababa by the mid-forties. Some went on their own means with a nominal government support, while others immigrated under contractual terms. The former consisted mostly of men of letters, teachers and writers who saw themselves as pan-African visionaries. The latter, whose term of contract lasted for two years, were mostly mechanics and technicians from Tuskegee. They were recruited by Robinson to serve as

maintenance crews for the U.S.-supplied planes under the land lease program. The technicians, about a half dozen in number, returned to Tuskegee at the end of their contract in 1947, but Robinson continued to work in Ethiopia as an aviation instructor until his death in an air accident in 1954.³³

Among the less known, yet influential, immigrants during this period were the Medhane Alem School headmaster, Thomas Fortune, and his teaching staff; William Steen and Homer Smith, both of them writers; and Charles Digges, a Texas-born medical doctor. A physician of an obscure background, Digges ran a health clinic in Debra-Birehan and later in Diredawa until his death in 1970.³⁴ Between 1944-1946 Steen served as the editor-in-chief of two English language publications: the Ethiopian Herald and the Ethiopian Review.³⁵ Smith, who arrived in Addis Ababa with a Russian wife from years of self-exile in the Soviet Union, succeeded Steen as the editor of the Ethiopian Review, and later on founded the English version of the Mannen magazine.³⁶

After the prematurely deceased Robinson, the most popular black immigrant in Ethiopia was the Guyanese-born

³³Harris, African-American Reaction to War pp. 142-51.

³⁴Shack, "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans," pp. 150-51.

³⁵Harris, African-American Reactions to War pp. 145-51.

³⁶Homer Smith, Black Man in Red Russia: A Memoir (Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 1964), see postscript.

David Talbot, whose prolific writings left an indelible mark on the country's literary culture. The Guyanese immigrant arrived in Ethiopia in 1943. After teaching in a government-run school in Harrar for some years, he replaced Steen as the editor of the Ethiopian Herald. Because of his experience as a newspaper editor in the United States, Talbot brought a semblance of modernity to the Herald, and under him the paper evolved from a tabloid-size weekly to a full-fledged daily.³⁷

Talbot's contribution was not confined to journalism alone. Although lacking a formal training in history, the West Indian produced three voluminous works on Ethiopia for the general reader. Inspired by Ford's exemplar as an educator, Talbot founded the American Institute, which offered evening classes at the elementary and secondary school levels.³⁸

Perhaps more than any other foreigner of his time, Talbot understood the subtlety of the Ethiopian elite, its intricacy and its behind-the-scene intrigues, so much so he became a favored royal courtier. As a palace confidant, he was regularly called upon to help refine speech drafts in English, and was at one point considered for the translation work of Haile Selassie's Amharic autobiography. In return for

³⁷Interview with Ato Yakob Wolde-Mariam, former editor of the Ethiopian Herald, July 30, 1996.

³⁸Harris, Reactions to War p. 150.

his service, the Guyanese expatriate enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle: a lucrative government salary, a villa in the capital, and an agricultural farmland in Ambo.³⁹

In the 1950s Ethiopians were returning from overseas universities by the droves with specialized skills and radical ideas. The young intellectuals, as they came to be known collectively, called for the Ethiopianization of the bureaucracy and for the dismantling of royal patronage in favor of meritocracy. Because of his status as a well-paid and well-connected expatriate, and because of the Herald's consistently pro-American position, the young intellectuals saw Talbot as an agent of Western neocolonialism: a white face in black mask. Yakob Wolde-Mariam, a British-educated Ethiopian, replaced Talbot and Homer Smith as the editor of the Herald and Mannen respectively. The latter, after sixteen years in Ethiopia, left for Minnesota in 1962, and Talbot for a time considered the possibility of joining his cousin Ras Makonnen in Ghana. Fortunately for the West Indian, his contacts at high places paid off, and he was moved to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an expert in African affairs, a position associated with his role as a radio commentator on African issues.⁴⁰

It is evident from the above discussion that the post-

³⁹Interview with Yakob.

⁴⁰Ibid; also see Harris, Reactions to War pp. 150-51.

war immigrants, however fewer in number than their pre-war counterparts, played an important role in the country's modernization effort. In areas such as education and the press, emigre blacks contributed to the post-war society in ways that few European or Euro-American groups did. Their legacy becomes even more praise worthy as one considers the fact that, unlike white missionaries or diplomats, the former did not have the support of major institutions or governments.

No doubt, the African newcomers found it stressful to live in a society whose language and culture they did not fully grasp. Even such inconveniences considered, Ford, Talbot and Robinson found in Ethiopia what they had long lacked in prosperous America. They enjoyed personal freedom, respectability and national recognition, hence their adoption of Ethiopia as a second home.

In the final analysis, the immigrants' loyalty to Ethiopia should be measured not by their successes but by the suffering they shared with their fellow Africans. The fates of Ford and Talbot in the cataclysmic seventies and eighties were not different from those of other Ethiopians of similar social backgrounds. Given his association with the previous government, Talbot was among the many palace functionaries the Derg let go. Talbot, as did Mrs. Ford, had his school forcibly closed and his villa on Bole Road confiscated. Broke

and socially alienated, the Guyanese immigrant died an obscure figure in Addis Ababa in 1988.⁴¹ The more resourceful Ford was not as unfortunate, but still had to weather the storm with her two sons in Washington. Having returned to her adopted homeland in 1984, Mrs. Ford died and was buried in Addis Ababa in 1995.⁴²

The Pipers and the Shashemene Settlement

Although the number of actual immigrants to Ethiopia in the forties was negligible, at least hundreds had entertained the idea of immigration to Northeast Africa. In 1947, for example, the EWF's chapter in Chicago wrote to the ministry of foreign affairs in Addis Ababa inquiring about the possibility of resettlement for more than three hundred of its members, 68 of whom were trained in diverse areas of aircraft maintenance and had a total capital of \$27,400 in cash, \$30,880 in clothes, and \$12,565 in tools.⁴³

In 1948 two EWF members, James and his wife Helen Piper arrived in Ethiopia from New York to negotiate a land grant deal. Seven years later, their effort resulted in a generous

⁴¹Interview with Yakob.

⁴²"Diamonds of the African World," Ethiopian Register February 1995.

⁴³Shack, "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans," p. 151.

land offer. Some five-hundred acres of farm land was set aside in the outskirts of Shashemene for occidental blacks, a tribute to their wartime support for the beleaguered nation. The EWF was entrusted with the task of recruiting such pioneer settlers as skilled farmers and artisans.⁴⁴

With the Pipers actual arrival on the Rift Valley site, the year 1955 marked the beginning of the Shashemene settlement scheme, hitherto a personal estate of the emperor. In the same year the Montserranian couple moved to the southern district, the EWF headquarters in New York wrote a letter to one of its branches in Jamaica describing The land grant and calling for would-be immigrants to take up its challenge. The communication stressed several points. First, since the Ethiopian government had no resources to cope with a large scale migration, the would-be settlers must be of the "pioneering caliber," and should be willing to forgo physical and material comforts. Second, individualism and self-greed should be replaced by a "cooperative spirit of all for one and one for all." Third, the first groups of pioneer settlers should possess such practical skills as farming, plumbing, masonry and carpentry, to be followed subsequently by professionals like doctors, nurses and teachers. Fourth, the five-hundred-acre estate was donated on a "trial basis,"

⁴⁴Yakob Wolde-Mariam, "Journey to Awasa," Mannen 6, 2 (1962), p. 21.

which meant that a good use of it might lead to further rewards. The letter concluded by instructing each EWF chapter in Jamaica to organize fund-raising campaigns to cover the transportation and resettlement expenses of qualified individuals.⁴⁵

The letter represented EWF's founding pan-African principles and vision. In Jamaica, however, where the peasantry had always connected land with personal freedom and independence, the news of the land grant invoked powerful images. Shashemene symbolized the antitheses of the Sufferers' experience in the West: freedom, land, peace, tranquility and simplicity. It also confirmed the Rastafarians' perception of Ethiopia as the promised land and of Haile Selassie as the Messiah.

The letter from New York revived the back-to-Africa ideology on the one hand, while re-entrenching certain Messianic preoccupations on the other. Since World War II the number of Jamaican immigrants to England in search of employment and better living conditions had grown. But after the news of the land grant reached Jamaica, "England no, Ethiopia yes" became a popular motto. Consequently, the Rastafarian movement not only "doubled its membership

⁴⁵M.G. Smith, Roi Augier and Rex Nettleford, The Rastafari Movement in Kingston Jamaica (Mona, Jamaica: University College of the West Indies, 1960), pp. 39-40.

overnight,"⁴⁶ but it also became "a full-blown belief in mass migration."⁴⁷

In response to the news from Shashemene, there appeared a series of millenarian scenes in which hundreds of Jamaican peasants and members of the urban under class would crowd at a designated site waiting for a miraculous deliverance. In September 1955, during a visit to Kingston by an EWF official from New York, there were talks about the imminent arrival of Ethiopian ships to take the Rastas back to Africa.⁴⁸ In March 1958, similar reports appeared in the Jamaican papers about groups of Rasta faithfuls assembled in Kingston, where self-cleansing rituals and prayer services were underway, in preparation for mass departure.⁴⁹

The most notorious of these millenarian episodes was the 1959 Henry fiasco. Claudius Henry had established the African Reform Church in Kingston giving himself a special title as "Repairer of the Bridge." Henry's charismatic personality attracted a large number of followers throughout the island, many of whom regarded him as a prophet. In the summer of 1959 the Reform Church distributed several thousand

⁴⁶Leonard Barrett, The Rastafarians: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), p. 90.

⁴⁷Smith, Rastafari Movement p. 17.

⁴⁸Barrett, Rastafarians pp. 89-90.

⁴⁹Barrett, Rastafarians pp. 92-94; Smith, Rastafari Movement pp. 18-19.

leaflets, each worth a shilling, announcing October fifth as the day of embarkation to Africa. Already predisposed to certain millenarian ideals, the Dreads took the message on the leaflets literally, many selling their land and property before joining him.⁵⁰

In the aftermath of the fiasco, Henry was imprisoned and released with a fine of one hundred pounds.⁵¹ But the social crisis that ensued, as a result of the many hundreds, whose lives had been disrupted by the false prophet, forced the government to pay closer attention. More significantly, the Henry crisis prompted the creation of a research team headed by a group of university professors to look into the Rastafarian plight. In a masterful orchestration of the intellectuals' sense of social responsibility and the need for scholarly integrity at the same time, in 1960 the team published what would turn out to be a classic study on Rastafarianism. Situating the Sufferers' experience in a Jamaican socio-historical context, the monograph recommended a number of ameliorative measures to be adopted by the government.⁵²

In accordance with the first point of recommendation,

⁵⁰Barrett, Rastafarians pp. 95-97; Smith, Rastafarian Movement pp. 19-20.

⁵¹Barrett, Rastafarians p. 97.

⁵²Smith, Rastafari Movement pp. 34-38.

in 1961 the Norman Manley government launched an exploratory "mission" to Ethiopia and four other countries in Africa to study the feasibility of repatriation. The Mission consisted of nine men, including Rastafarian and EWF representatives, as well as Dr. Courtenay Leslie, the head of the delegation and a medical practitioner.⁵³ During its week-long stay in Ethiopia, April 16-23, the group traveled widely and met with various officials, including the head of the Orthodox Church, with whom it discussed theosophy. When asked by members of the mission whether he believed in the emperor's divinity, Patriarch Basilios explained that the king was an ordinary human being, a devout Christian at that. The Messiah was not expected to reveal his identity, his visitors retorted, "for he that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased."⁵⁴

Even more significant than the meeting with the Patriarch, an audience with the emperor at the palace marked the high point of the West Indian tour. The monarch received the delegation as "brothers of one blood and race," presenting each member with a gold medal as souvenir. Tackling the issue of repatriation, the king explained his readiness to provide additional land for settlement after the

⁵³Report of Mission to Africa (Kingston: Government Printer, 1961), pp. 1-3; "Good Will Mission from West Indies," Ethiopian Herald April 18, 1961.

⁵⁴Barrett, Rastafarians p. 108.

specific details had been worked out between the Ethiopian and the Jamaican governments.⁵⁵

An American traveler, John Gunther, had written in 1955 that Ethiopians, however black in complexion, considered themselves "white" and looked down on "Negroid" Africans as inferior.⁵⁶ His point was corroborated by Harold Isaacs, another white writer, who argued that Ethiopian officials, including the late Melaku Bayen, did not identify with colored Americans.⁵⁷ Isaac's and Gunther's opinions reinforced the pseudo-scientific notion that Ethiopians were black Caucasians, a view shared by the aforementioned Carleton Coon.⁵⁸

Contrary to what they had read and were prepared for, the Jamaicans experienced no racial or cultural hostility in Ethiopia. Their subsequent report in fact dismissed as unfounded the commonly held stereotype of Ethiopians. "On one point the Mission would like to make an observation," their report to the Jamaican government stated. "There has been a notion spread by certain publications, and touted by many

⁵⁵Report of Mission to Africa pp. 3-4. Also see "The Emperor Receives Jamaican Delegates," Ethiopian Herald April 22, 1961.

⁵⁶Gunther, Inside Africa pp. 251 and 255.

⁵⁷Harold Isaacs, The New World of Negro Americans (New York: Viking, 1964), pp. 152-53.

⁵⁸Carleton Coon, The Races of Europe (New York: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 449-56.

non-Africans, that people of Ethiopia and the Emperor consider themselves apart and above from the peoples of central Africa, the so-called 'Negroids.' Nothing of the kind has been observed by the Mission on their visit to Africa."⁵⁹

The mission endorsed Jamaican migration to Ethiopia not only on racial grounds, but also for reasons of geography and climate. Outside the capital, sites visited by the group included the Koka hydro-power dam, the coffee growing region of Jimma, the Wanji sugar factory and the resettlement land in Shashemene. In all these sites the delegates observed certain similarities between Ethiopia and Jamaica, namely the fact that both countries were agricultural nations with identical climates. In the report of their findings, the visitors noted that Jamaicans possessed the type of agricultural skills that would make their migration to Ethiopia practical and useful. Jamaica had long exported coffee, sugar and sugar-related products like rum and molasses to the world market. This in mind, the Mission argued that West Indian expertise could, among other things, be used in the expansion and growth of the coffee plantations and the sugar industry in Ethiopia.⁶⁰

The above report, however favorable to the repatriation

⁵⁹Report of Mission to Africa p. 5-6. "Jamaican Visitors Impressed," Ethiopian Herald April 23, 1961.

⁶⁰Report of Mission to Africa p. 4.

question, found no sympathetic hearing from the new prime minister, Alexander Bustamante, whose Jamaican Labor Party, JLP, ousted Manley's Peoples' National Party, PNP, during the 1962 election. A hard-liner on social issues, Bustamante put a lid on the repatriation scheme, resorting instead to harsher police measures as the government's means to contain the simmering urban crisis.⁶¹

The mission had found the Pipers' in Shashemane living a simple yet idyllic lifestyle. Ethiopian citizens by now, they had built themselves a bungalow, ran a commercial flour mill, raised live stock, and grew corn and sunflower using modern farming techniques.⁶² A year later, when a prominent Ethiopian journalist and a Jamaican photographer visited the southern town, the settlement land still consisted of the Pipers alone. The only improvement was that the Pipers now ran a two-room school for the local children which they named after the founder of the EWF: the Melaku Bayen Elementary School.⁶³ The land grant site would thus remain mostly unsettled and under-utilized for the next several years, mostly due to the JLP's aversive attitude to the settlement scheme.

⁶¹Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), p. 8.

⁶²Report of Mission to Africa p. 5.

⁶³Yakob, "Journey to Awasa," pp. 21-22.

Ethio-Caribbean ties in the Post-OAU Period

Until the early 1960s, black fascination with Ethiopia was inspired by spiritual or socio-historical factors. The establishment of the UNECA and the OAU headquarters in Addis Ababa, in 1958 and 1963 respectively, added a diplomatic dimension to Ethiopia's significance. Haile Selassie's revered status as the continent's eldest statesman further justified Addis Ababa's role as Africa's de facto capital, making it a Mecca for ministers and heads of states.

The first New World black politician to travel to Addis Ababa in the post-OAU era was Malcolm X, the renowned African-American nationalist, and one-time member and spokesman of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X makes no mention of his visit to Addis Ababa in his autobiography, whereas he describes in depth his meetings with various African state officials in their respective countries: Nasser of Egypt, Nkrumah of Ghana, and Azikiwe of Nigeria.⁶⁴ The autobiography refers to Ethiopia only in the context of Malcolm's trip to Mecca.

In 1963 when Malcolm made his first pilgrimage to Islam's holiest site, he was still an obscure figure in the

⁶⁴Malcolm X, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 349-61.

Arab world. In fact, he was detained for a whole day at the airport in Jidah until the authenticity of the document of his conversion to Islam was verified. In the meantime, his distress had been accentuated by his inability to communicate since no one around him spoke any English. He writes that, when he finally saw "two black men chatting in "British-accented English," he felt such a relief that he "nearly shouted" with joy:

Before their party approached, ready to leave for Mecca, we were able to talk enough to exchange that I was American and they were Ethiopians. . . . I was later going to learn to my surprise that, in Ethiopia, with eighteen million people, ten million were Muslims. Most people think Ethiopia is Christian, but only its government is Christian. The West has always helped to keep the Christian government in power.⁶⁵

Malcolm's visit to the OAU headquarters in October 1963 did not receive official notice, nor did it capture the attention of the government-run press. On the university students' request, however, Malcolm X spoke at the AAU campus. "I feel more at home among you than in America, a country which has not accepted us for three hundred years now." He spoke of American racial hypocrisy, and called on all peoples of color to join hands in the black man's struggle for freedom and equality.⁶⁶ In its editorial, the

⁶⁵Ibid p. 330.

⁶⁶"Malcolm Addresses UCAA Students," News and Views 9 (October 27, 1963), p. 2.

major campus publication News and Views complimented Malcolm X as "one of the great figures in today's fight of the black man in America for equality and justice." "His extremely powerful voice," it added, "his excellent choice of words, but above all, the conviction and enthusiasm with which he spoke, kept all in the meeting literally spellbound."⁶⁷

Despite Malcolm's hostility toward the Haile Selassie government, or even because of it, the Ethiopian students attached great importance to his visit. Malcolm's appearance stimulated the students' anti-American stance, to which effect appeared a number of militant articles by the college radicals. One article particularly stood out for its inflammatory language reminiscent of Malcolm's earlier days as the spokesman for the Nation of Islam.⁶⁸ In a piece titled "Our God is Black," Assegede Hagos argued that blacks had long been victims of European exploitation and that in pan-Africanism alone lay their political and economic redemption. "If the Black Angels want to leave the White Devils no place to stand on, it is by unity," Assegede declared.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸After his breakaway from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X abandoned his collective indictment of whites. By the time of his assassination in February 1964, Malcolm X had already cast away his separatist racial ideology in favor of a more practical agenda dealing with civil rights and economic issues.

⁶⁹Balsvik, Haile Selassie's Students p. 208.

The Oxford-educated historian and a prolific writer, Prime Minister Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago was the antithesis to black radicalism. Like Malcolm X months before him, Williams addressed the university community in March 1964, and his speech had a sobering impact. In one incident the premier recounted his deep-rooted connection with Ethiopia going far back to his college years in England: "I would very much like to mention of the resolutions passed by students in London during my school days there, in which they protested and denounced Italy's aggression of Ethiopia. I am very highly pleased to have this opportunity to visit Ethiopia."⁷⁰

A world class scholar, Williams spoke of the African intelligentsia and its challenges, pointing out the impossibility of creating "African unity in the face of intellectual disunity." Referring to his own academic credentials as an authority on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the premier admitted that very little research had been done by African scholars on the history of Africa's colonial and pre-colonial pasts, and therefore called for the cooperation of African universities to launch a common African research institution.⁷¹

⁷⁰"His Imperial Majesty Receives in Audience Dr. Eric Williams," Ethiopian Herald March 17, 1964.

⁷¹"Dr. Eric Williams Addresses HSIU Students and staff," Ethiopian Herald March 17, 1964.

A positive outcome from Williams' trip was the decision by both countries to establish diplomatic representations in each other's capital.⁷² Although the Ethiopian government reneged on its side of the deal, Williams honored his word by naming Mrs. Isabel Tesha--his minister of Public Health and Housing--as Trinidad's ambassador to Ethiopia. Trinidad thus became the first English-speaking Caribbean country to be represented in Addis Ababa, at least until Ethiopia's alliance with the Eastern Block in the mid-seventies convinced the Trinidadian government to close the embassy.⁷³

If Malcolm X and Eric Williams' visits contributed to the Ethiopians' growing awareness of the Afro-Atlantic world, Haile Selassie's periodic trips to the West made an even deeper impression on the latter. As a widely-traveled statesman, Haile Selassie knew how to reach out to black communities, even when his schedules seemed over-extended with diplomatic formalities. During his June 1954 tour of the super-power nation, the king visited Howard University, where he was honored with a doctorate degree, and then took a trip to Harlem for Sunday mass at the Abyssinian Baptist Church.⁷⁴

⁷²"Eric Williams Ends Visit to Ethiopia: Communique Issued," Ethiopian Herald March 20, 1964.

⁷³Interview with Garnet Springer: January 3, 1997.

⁷⁴On this particular occasion, the service was led by the Democratic Congressman, the Rev. Adam Clayton Powell. See Ethiopian Ministry of Information, "Girmawinetachew American Sigobengyu," July 1954.

Similarly, in his October 1963 trip to the United States, the Lion of Judah gave an exclusive interview to Ebony, in which he underscored the unity of purpose between Africans and African-Americans in their quest for freedom and equality. Expressing his government's gratitude to the wartime racial support, he told the monthly magazine of the availability of agricultural land for interested black settlers in Ethiopia. Even more forceful than the Ebony interview was the monarch's moving denunciation of racism and colonialism at the UN general assembly in New York. The speech, second in significance after the emperor's historic address to the League of Nations in Geneva in 1936, provided the lyrics for one of Bob Marley's major hits, "War," in the seventies.⁷⁵

Of all Haile Selassie's worldwide travels, his 1966 Caribbean journey was the most memorable, so much so the event was profiled in a forty-two-page-long document by the Ethiopian ministry of information.⁷⁶ The historic tour, which covered Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti respectively, began on April 18th and ended a week later on the 25th. The trip triggered a spontaneous yet uninhibited warmth of welcome. In

⁷⁵Allan Morrison, "Selassie's Message to the Negro," Ebony 19, 2 (1963), pp. 30-32.

⁷⁶Ethiopian Ministry of Information, Janhoy Be Karibian Desetoch (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printers, Hamle 16, 1958 EC).

Haiti, the road that led from the national airport into Port-au-Prince was named Haile Selassie I Avenue.⁷⁷ In Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, a plot of land was set aside in the emperor's name for the construction of a cathedral for the more than a half dozen EOC branches in the island.⁷⁸

Jamaica's welcome not only surpassed that of its sister islands in pomp and circumstance, but it was unparalleled by any other similar event in the island's own history. To highlight the significance of the occasion, the Jamaican government had declared April 21st, the date of the emperor's arrival, a public holiday. As a result, the welcoming crowd at the Palisadoes International Airport was estimated at fifty to a hundred thousand, the largest gathering ever.⁷⁹

The thousands of Rastafarians regarded the imperial entry to Jamaica, which coincided with a drastic weather change, as proof of Tefari's divinity. It had been raining profusely as the plane bearing the Ethiopian insignia approached. As soon as the Boeing 707 landed in Kingston, the downpour stopped and bright sunshine burst out through the dark clouds. So mesmerized was the crowd by the event, the Gleaner reported, that it instantly exploded into such a joyous "roar" as "had never been heard at the Palisadoes

⁷⁷Ibid p. 39.

⁷⁸Ibid pp. 1-3.

⁷⁹Ibid p. 18.

before."⁸⁰

No sooner had the plane touched down than the exuberant Rastafarian crowd broke through the police line and charged into the airport terminal shouting biblical praises and pan-African slogans. The plane remained besieged for a half hour, and was not until appeal was made to the crowd by Mortimer Planno, a respected Rastafarian elder, that the runway was cleared for disembarkation.⁸¹

Because of the chaos, the special red-carpet reception was cancelled and the monarch whisked out of the airport under tight security. All the same, the procession was dubbed as "a welcome of superlatives" by the Daily Gleaner. "There never has been in the whole history of Jamaica," the daily read, "such a spontaneous heart-warming and sincere welcome to any person--whether visiting monarch, visiting V.I.P., or returning leader of any Jamaican party." The emperor's reaction to the occasion was equally "extraordinary," the paper added. "The tears welled up in his eyes and rolled down his face." "It will perhaps never be known whether he cried in sorrow at the uncontrollableness of the vast throng of Jamaicans who had gathered to meet him, or out of pure joy;

⁸⁰"Tumultuous Scenes and Program Dislocated," Daily Gleaner april 22, 1966.

⁸¹"Tumultuous Scenes and Program Dislocated," and "Police Lines Broken at Civic Reception," Daily Gleaner April 22, 1966.

but whatever it was, it was an emotional reaction to a highly emotional welcome."⁸²

During his three-day-stay in Jamaica, the 74-year-old statesman held a busy schedule from addressing the joint house of parliament to attending a university graduation ceremony to placing the foundation stone for a would-be Haile Selassie Secondary School in Kingston. He conferred with a group of Rastafarian elders and, to the surprise of those who remembered Garvey's biting editorials against the exiled negus in 1936, laid a bouquet of flowers in memory of the Jamaican national hero.⁸³

Haile Selassie's travels in the Caribbean had multi-fold impacts. First, The imperial visit catapulted the Sufferers and their cause into "unprecedented" national and international spotlight. "Jamaicans greeted the royal personage with such enthusiasm that devotion to Ethiopia, qua Africa, and to Selassie rivaled, and appeared to threaten, the rising Jamaican nationalism and patriotism," notes Nathaniel Murrell. Such was the extent of the pro-Ethiopian loyalty that, "one month after the Royal visit, a member of the Jamaican Senate gave notice of a Motion that the Jamaican Constitution be amended to make the Emperor of Ethiopia,

⁸²"Wild Welcome and the Emperor Wept," Daily Gleaner April 22, 1966.

⁸³"Troops Guard Selassie on Trip to Rasta Areas," Trinidad Guardian April 24, 1966.

H.I.M. Haile Selassie, the king of Jamaica in place of the Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom."⁸⁴

Second, incidents such as the drastic weather change that surrounded the emperor's entry to Jamaica reinforced his aura of divinity. Rumors multiplied about the monarch's supernatural powers and mystical qualities in the course of his island-wide travels. Rita Marley, who until then sang in a church choir and taught Sunday school, became an instant convert to the millenarian faith after claiming to have seen the "Holy Stigmata," the nail marks of the crucifix, on Haile Selassie's hand. Other Rastas spoke of the Elect of God having presented Donald Sanghster, the acting prime minister, with a miniature coffin in the form of a gilded cigarette case, and connected that with Sanghster's subsequent death of cancer.⁸⁵

Finally, the king's visit made it clear that Ethiopia was no longer a mere abstraction, remote and unreachable. Until 1966 only a handful of Jamaicans had ventured to Ethiopia. After the historic visit, the number of Rastafarian immigrants in Shashemene would multiply, rising to three or four dozens by the early 1970s. However distant and demographically insignificant, the emigre community in

⁸⁴Murrell, Chanting Down Babylon pp. 8-9.

⁸⁵Timothy White, Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley (New York: H. Holt, 1998), pp. 210-12.

Shashemene would henceforth become an important reference point in Jamaican political consciousness. In February 1969, Prime Minister Hughes Shearer visited the settlement site in Shashemene; and, lest outdone in the eyes of the masses, his political opponent, Michael Manley, followed suit some months later.⁸⁶

Shashemene After 1966

In the aftermath of Haile Selassie's visit to the Caribbean, a slow but steady stream of migration to Shashemene began, some of it from Britain and the rest directly from the West Indies. In its July 17 1971 issue, the Daily Gleaner featured an article on the promised land, accompanied by photographs of the settlement site and of two-dozen settlers. Inspired by such favorable reports, repatriation efforts reached fever pitch. The EWF branch in Kingston, Local 15, some of whose members included university students, sent petitions to the government and United Nations soliciting their financial and political support to their Zionist cause. Contact was established between Local 15 and the EWF branch in Chicago to explore the possibility of negotiating for an additional land grant, and in September

⁸⁶"Ethiopian World Federation Incorporation Official Black Paper," (Shashemene: EWF, 1992), pp. 3 and 5.

1972 the Local succeeded in sending one of its members to Ethiopia. Some months later, in February 1973, a two-column advertisement appeared in the popularly read Weekend Star describing an ongoing census project. So as to give the repatriation petition more political weight, the newspaper announcement advised that those wishing to return to Africa be counted in a formal census and the result be sent to the United Nations and the Jamaican government.⁸⁷

Events in Shashemene were, in the meantime, taking a radically different course. As more immigrants arrived and the homestead expanded, tensions arose between the Pipers and the newcomers. The former were accused of a heavy-handed rule, of deliberately discouraging potential pioneers from coming, and of expropriating communal facilities such as the overseas-donated tractor for an exclusive use. In 1967 Gladstone Robinson, one of the newcomers, replaced James Piper as the administrator of the settlement, and three years later the land was officially divided among twelve pioneer families, 2.2 hectares per head. The Pipers continued to own the remaining portion of the estate with the understanding that they were to relinquish parts of it as more immigrants arrived.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Joseph Owens, Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp. 240-42.

⁸⁸The twelve individuals among whom the land was divided are listed in the EWF's "official paper" as Gerald Brissett,

Despite the division of the land into individual plots and the removal of the Montserranian from influence, there was little progress in Shashemene during the early seventies. As more homesteaders moved in, the land tension grew worse and, with it, their social problems. Since almost all the newcomers were men, sexual tension was one obvious by-product. One of the few female immigrants had, for instance, the misfortune of being attacked by a machete-wielding rapist leaving her with a severed right arm for the rest of her life.⁸⁹

Finally, the repatriation scheme suffered its worst setback in the aftermath of the 1974 revolution. The existence of the settler community had long been associated with the emperor and his good will. The new anti-monarchical regime not only ordered the expulsion of Mr. Robinson, the head of the homesteaders, but had most of their settlement and property nationalized.⁹⁰ The community began to deteriorate as those with resources departed. For example, Desmond Christie left for Kenya, while the prosperous

Solomon Wolfe, Desmond Christie, Clifton Baugh, Noel Dyer, Gladstone Robinson, Vincent Beckford, Lanford Baugh, Uriah Brown, Willie Hillman, Carmen Clarke, and Sepha Malcolm. See "EWF Paper," pp. 4-5.

⁸⁹Derek Bishton, Blackheart Man: A Journey into Rasta (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), pp. 38-9.

⁹⁰"EWF Paper," pp. 5 and 8.

Montserratians returned to New York. .⁹¹

What saved the settlement from extinction was the arrival of a new breed of Rastafarians who called themselves the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Founded in 1968 by Vernon Carrington, a one-time street vendor, the Twelve Tribes were a centrally organized, middle-class-oriented Rastafarian sect, with whom many well-known Reggae artists had association.⁹²

The first bands of the Twelve Tribes arrived in Shashemene in 1972 and 1973, more following after the revolution. Because of better financial resources, their presence introduced a visible change in the community's material culture. Earlier EWF pioneers dwelled in simply built structures, while the Twelve Tribes constructed well-furnished brick houses. Because of their rural background, the EWF settlers generally lived off the land as subsistence farmers. The Twelve Tribes made their living as shopkeepers and artisans. With few exceptions, the EWF sect members practiced a vegetarian lifestyle, neither drinking alcohol nor smoking cigarettes. The Twelve Tribes did not impose dietary restrictions, and in so doing assimilated more easily

⁹¹Bishton, Blackheart man pp. 39-40.

⁹²Followers of the Twelve Tribes regard themselves as descendants from the twelve sons of Jacob, hence the name Twelve Tribes. See Frank Jan Van Dijk, "The Twelve Tribes of Israel: Rasta and the Middle Class," New West Indian Guide 62, 1 (1988), pp. 1-22.

into the local culture.⁹³

Besides being secular and urbane, another important advantage the newcomers had over the EWF pioneers came from the fact that they migrated as family units. There were seventeen families--one of them with four children--who arrived in Shashemene in the seventies, fifteen from Jamaica, two from Trinidad. As a result of their strong family ethos, the Twelve Tribes not only created around themselves a stable community, but they also grew in number. According to one recent count, the Twelve Tribes numbered close to 120, two-thirds of them locally-born children. The EWF, by contrast, had 26 members only, eleven of whom lived outside Shashemene.⁹⁴

Unlike the Talbots or the Fords of the earlier decades, the Rastafarian returnees of the post-1974 period have done little to impress the host country. In 1980 Desie Martin, member of the Twelve Tribes, was able to capture the sports community's attention as the fastest sprinter in the country, but he did not stay in the athletic scene long enough to get national notice. Married to an Ethiopian and a father of four, Desie has since drifted into business and is now owner

⁹³Ababu, "Rastafarians in the Promised Land," pp. 73 and 76.

⁹⁴Ibid p. 74.

of a transportation bus.⁹⁵

It is true the presence of the homestead community in Shashemene has drawn world-class Reggae artists as visitors to Ethiopia--the late Bob Marley and his wife Rita, Dennis Brown, Muta Baruka, Tony Rebel, Buju Banton, and Neville Garrick, among others.⁹⁶ However, Being too remote from the major urban center, the settlers themselves had little influence on the spread of Reggae as a national musical phenomenon. As for the few West Indians who settled in Addis Ababa as artists and musicians, their role as cultural ambassadors was also frustrated by immigration red tape and lack of work permits. For example, the first Reggae nightclub in Addis Ababa, the Ram-and-Jam Club, run by a Jamaican DJ, was forced to close because of repeated police harassments and arrests, often under the unproven charges of drug smuggling.⁹⁷

In a sense, it is in a wider international context where the presence of the emigre community in Shashemene has

⁹⁵For a short biographical sketch of Desmond Martin, see Martin's interviews in Libro, an Amharic weekly sport newspaper: in its issues of Meskerem 12 and Tikimt 10, 1988, EC.

⁹⁶Interviews with Michelle and Ras Quintseb Selassie (April 11, 1988). Also see Michelle's article "Zelalem Boosts Ethiopia," Monitor November 16, 1997; and "Zelege is Said to Bring it onto Home," Monitor, January 17, 1998.

⁹⁷Fikru Gebrekidan, "Rastafarians in Ethiopia," Ethiopian Register 5, 8 (August 1998), pp. 28-32.

born historic significance. In 1986 Derek Bishton published BlackHeart Man, in which he presented a brief but fascinating account of his stay with the homesteaders. Bishton's interview with some of the settler pioneers gave the once obscure community faces and voices. For example, there was the striking story of Noel Dyer who walked or hitchhiked his way from London to Ethiopia. A Jamaican of a rural background, Dyer left London for the same reason many other Rastas left Europe and America for Ethiopia: the lure of the promised land. He arrived in Shashemene after a year-long-journey through France, the Maghrib, Egypt and the Sudan where he was imprisoned for an unlawful entry into the country.⁹⁸

Bishton's account put on map an otherwise obscure Rift Valley hamlet, and Shashemene has since become a source of international attraction. It turned the backwater district, better known for its volcanic lakes and variety of birds, into a source of sociological curiosity. Breathtaking stories like that of Dyer have captured the attention of tourists, journalists, and film crews including that of the BBC.⁹⁹

Such publicity has in turn made the land grant village a popular destination of pan-African pilgrimage. Since Western travel to Ethiopia was made easier by the ousting of

⁹⁸Bishton, Blackheart Man pp. 28-30.

⁹⁹Ababu, "Rastafarians in the Promised Land," p. 74.

the Marxist regime in 1991, the number of Rasta sojourners to Shashemene has multiplied by several fold. During Haile Selassie's centennial birthday celebration in July 1992, the southern town received scores of black visitors. The 1996 Adwa centenary in Addis Ababa, whose highlights included Reggae concerts by such renowned Jamaican artists as Junior Delgado and Ini Kamoze, also attracted several groups of Rasta travelers.¹⁰⁰

The picture of West Indians in Ethiopia is far from rosy, however, even after discounting the aforementioned hardships of the transitional phase. As the homesteaders grew in number, so did the magnitude of their social problems. In 1982 fourteen members of the Twelve Tribes were arrested on charges of drug smuggling, eight of whom were taken to the capital to stand trial. Ever since that crackdown new West Indian immigrants to Shashemene have been denied permanent residence. The restriction might have, to some degree, deterred further migration, but also had the effect of forcing some of the newcomers to go underground as illegal aliens. Because of Shashemene's overcrowding and its internal social frictions, prospective immigrants are either discouraged from coming to Ethiopia or induced to settle in

¹⁰⁰Interviews with Michelle Selassie and Ras Tagassa King: April 11 and April 13, 1998, respectively.

Addis Ababa without work permits or up-to-date visas.¹⁰¹

Likewise, the relationship between the Shashemene settler community and the local government has not always been cordial. Before the land grant arrangement, the five-hundred-acre land was a personal estate of the emperor. Even so, the local Oromo farmers were only too glad to seize the land following the 1975 land reform proclamation. The Derg finally returned a fifth of the land to its foreign occupants, but the locals continued to resent the presence of what they saw was a relatively privileged settler class.

According to Horace Campbell, one of a handful West Indian scholars to visit Shashemene, the Rastafarians were in part to blame for the discord between them and the locals. The Marxist Campbell argues that the West Indians did not understand the anti-imperial and revolutionary fervor of the landless peasantry. They naively interpreted their loyalty to the king as loyalty to the country, a distortion of Ethiopian patriotism. By publicly displaying pictures of the deposed monarch, the Rastas showed insensitivity toward their neighbors' feelings. Thus, a movement begun in Jamaica as a social revolt against capitalistic exploitation turned, after transplantation in Ethiopia, degenerate and retrogressive.¹⁰²

A more serious setback to the settler community, worse

¹⁰¹"EWF Paper," p. 6.

¹⁰²Horace Campbell, Rasta and Resistance p. 229.

than its friction with the locals or the government, has been its own internal division. What began as a clash of leadership between the Pipers and the others in the sixties took the form of factional rivalry after the mid-seventies. The EWF members, who saw themselves as the rightful custodian of the land grant, considered the Twelve Tribes as interlopers, while the latter accused the EWF of having done little to develop the settlement. Consequently, there has been little interaction between the two, social or otherwise. In 1987 Vernon Carrington, the Kingston-based leader of the Twelve Tribes, came to Shashemene with fifty prospective settlers. Carrington and the EWF representatives met in person trying to iron out their differences but to no avail. The EWF, to whom much of the settlement site still belonged, rejected Carrington's scheme of expansion and the newcomers were subsequently resettled in Ghana.¹⁰³

Repatriation as A cultural and Spiritual Sojourn

According to Joseph Owens's study of Rastafari in the early seventies, the process of repatriation had three layers: cultural, physical, and messianic. Return to Africa in the physical sense and the embrace of African cultural identity were reminiscent of Garvey's back-to-Africa scheme.

¹⁰³"EWF Paper" p. 6.

Unlike Garveyism, however, the Rastas believed in repatriation as a divinely inspired process. Contrary to the scores of Sufferers who trickled to Ethiopia a few at a time, most brethren expected a massive scale migration. Since the manner and time of the exodus depended on God's plan, they objected to self-initiated departure as a subversion of the providential design. "In the first place, such action would evince despair of God's saving power," states Owens, "and, furthermore, one could not hope to be any more than an immigrant in such a procedure."¹⁰⁴

Logistics aside, belief in providential deliberation explains why only a small number of Rastas left for Ethiopia in the sixties and seventies, according to Owens. After the late seventies, migration to Ethiopia reached a virtual standstill, and the few resettlement efforts in Shashemene, including that of Carrington, proved unsuccessful. Derg's elevation to power and the distinction it created between church and state contradicted the West Indians' image of the country as a theocratic kingdom or the new Zion. Following the overthrow and subsequent death or "disappearance" of the emperor, some Rastas concluded that Haile Selassie did not represent the second coming of Christ but only his human manifestation. With this, they rejected the religious and eschatological dimension of Rastafari and explain their

¹⁰⁴Owens, Dread p. 237.

association with the movement in terms of its pan-African ideology.

The millenarian significance of Ethiopia as the new Jerusalem has caused much rethinking even among the hard-core Rastafarians. Sectarianism, personality differences and national politics have prevented the homestead settlement from becoming what its founders had hoped for: a self-reliant, model community. These setbacks have been instrumental in the re-examination and redefinition of certain beliefs. The motto that "repatriation is a must and Babylon is foreign" is no longer taken literally. Travels through the less developed parts of the world have made Rastas aware that African countries, including Ethiopia, are not immune to the types of social evils that have plagued the capitalist West. Moreover, Since the land grant experiment has shown the impracticality of wholesale migration, repatriation is now seen as a process of psychological transformation. Ethiopia is now as much a state of mind as it is a spot on the map; it symbolizes a spiritual and cultural sojourn to the past, the reconnectedness with one's ancient roots.¹⁰⁵

One means by which a psychological reunion with Africa has been made possible without physical relocation is through the conversion to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It has been

¹⁰⁵Murrell, Chanting Down Babylon p. 6.

a half century since the EOC has established branches throughout the West Indies. The EOC is seen by the Sufferers as filling a cultural void created by several centuries of slavery and forced separation from Africa, and as such provides a unique socio-cultural and religious context for those trying to reconnect with Africa culturally and spiritually. Even to Rasta loyalists, for whom Haile Selassie's divinity is non-negotiable, the Church still holds a positive meaning because of its image as a repository of ancient African culture and history. The offering of Amharic classes, the issuance of Ethiopian baptismal names, the celebration of Ethiopian holidays such as the new year and Epiphany, were but a few reasons why many Sufferers feel socially drawn to the Apostolic Church.

The concept of repatriation as a spiritual process is perhaps best exemplified by Bob Marley, the famous Reggae artist. In 1979 the Jamaican singer visited Shashemane in quest of a genuine Ethiopian experience, and a year later he was baptized into the EOC as Berhane-Selassie, (light of the Trinity), by the New York-based Abuna Yesehaq. The internationally acclaimed king of Reggae died of terminal Cancer in early 1981 at the age of 36 and his funeral service was conducted by Ethiopian priests in accordance with Ethiopian Church rites.¹⁰⁶ Bob's entire family--his wife

¹⁰⁶Steven Davis, Bob Marley (New York: Doubleday, 1985),

Rita, his children and their grandmother Cedella--has since openly associated with the Ethiopian Church. Rita, or Mendere-Genet, was a major financial benefactress in the construction of the Holy Trinity Church on Maxfield Road, the branch in which her first-born son Ziggy grew up serving as a deacon.¹⁰⁷

During his visit to Ethiopia Bob had tried to stage a public concert to raise funds for children's charity but his effort was thwarted by the security-conscious Marxist government. However, his hope to perform on stage with Ethiopian musicians was made real by his children and wife. Ziggy and the Melody Makers, as the new band of the Marley's came to be known, teamed up with the Chicago-based Ethiopian Dalool Band for a number of best selling albums, including the 1988 Conscious Party, one of whose popular numbers was a prayer chant in Amharic.¹⁰⁸ The Melody Makers have not performed in Ethiopia, but they have, as in their 1999 "Thirteen Months of Sunshine," popularized the new meaning of repatriation as a process of spiritual and cultural

p. 240.

¹⁰⁷The Marley's contribution toward the establishment of the Ethiopian Church in Kingston included the donation of church furniture and of additional ten thousand Birr for the construction of a church-owned bakery. See Tsegaye Wolde-Tekle to Patriarch Tekle-Haimanot: November 19, 1971 EC, EOC 1292.

¹⁰⁸"Dream of Home," in Conscious Party (Virgin Records, 1988).

sojourn.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹"Thirteen Months of Sunshine," in Spirit of Music (Elektra, 1999).

Chapter V

Ethiopian Christianity in the West

Earlier chapters have been concerned with personalities and ideas and their impact on identity transformation. This chapter examines how the symbolic concept of Ethiopianism, that had long characterized Caribbean attitude toward Ethiopia, grew to facilitate a less abstract and more functional cross-cultural interaction. Namely, this section investigates the transplantation process of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, EOC, in the New World. Presently, the EOC maintains branches in many North American cities and in most of the English-speaking Caribbean islands. A complete understanding of the Ethiopian-Caribbean connection therefore demands an inquiry into what one may refer to as modern Ethiopianisms: a form of Ethiopian cultural crossovers to the New World.

Since the 1941 publication of Melville Herskovits' seminal work, The Myth of the Negro Past, there has been a growing body of literature dealing with the African antecedents of the New World black cultures.¹ For the last five decades, historians and anthropologists have

¹Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941).

demonstrated African manifestations in New World black art, music, language and religion.² But despite the ever increasing interest in the study of African continuities, the research on Africanisms remains wanting in two key areas. First, the studies on African crossovers focus exclusively on the trans-Atlantic slave trade period, the 15th to the 19th centuries. As a result, contemporary African contributions to New World cultures have been ignored. Second, studies about New World African survivals have been based on West African influences. This West Africa-centered approach has preempted similar research agendas on cultural contacts between other regions of Africa and the New World.

These points in mind, a study of "modern Ethiopianisms" adds a new angle to the scholarship on African continuities. First, it shifts the focus on the discussion of Africanisms from West Africa to Northeast Africa, and thereby widens the geographic dimension of the discourse. Second, it reveals the ongoing cultural encounters between the two continents, and in so doing shows that African carryovers to the West are as dynamic today as they had been in the days of the heinous trans-Atlantic slave trade.

²Joseph E. Holloway, ed., Africanisms in American Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Franklin W. Knight, and Margaret Crahan, eds., Africa and the Caribbean: the Legacies of a Link (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

Precursor Events

According to the New Testament, black Africa's initial encounter with Christianity went back to the first century, perhaps to the fourth or fifth decade after the birth of Christ. According to the Acts of the Apostles, (8:26-40), Africa's first convert to Christianity was an Ethiopian eunuch. While on a visit to Jerusalem, the Ethiopian traveler, a high-ranking officer in the court of Queen Candace, was met by Philip the Apostle through whom he came to learn of the new faith. Baptized, the eunuch returned home and through him Christianity soon replaced Judaism as Ethiopia's official religion.³

The common consensus among historians is that Christianity entered what is now Northern Ethiopia in the middle of the fourth century. Two ship-wrecked Syrian travelers are credited for having introduced the new faith into the Axumite court. One of them, Frumentius, later Abuna Salama, traveled to the See of St. Mark in Alexandria where he was consecrated and sent back to Axum as Ethiopia's first

³Archbishop Yesehaq, The Ethiopian Tewahedo Church: an Integrally African Church (New York: Vantage Press, 1989), p. 13.

bishop.⁴ In succeeding centuries, Christianity grew not only to become the official religion of Ethiopia's ruling class and that of the highland populace, but also went through a gradual process of Africanization. The Church became Africanized as a result of its syncretistic accommodation of indigenous traditions, not least of which was the canonization of Ethiopians as martyrs and saints.⁵ According to Jan Schalkwick, a professor of comparative religion, the Ethiopian Church was "indigenized in the African context, expressing itself in the rhythmic beat of the prayer sticks, the liturgical dance of the priests, the drums and hand-clapping, the indigenous round shape of many Southern African church buildings, the outdoor services, the place of angels and spirits, the struggle against demons, magic, sorcerers, and polygamy, the emphasis on church marriage, the sacrament of healing, and exorcism."⁶ Some of these features, namely the prayer stick and the liturgical dance are reminiscent of ancient Judaic practices more so than of traditional Africa. However, the drums, the hand-clapping, polygamy, the acknowledgement of malevolent and propitious

⁴Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia: 1270-1527 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 21-25.

⁵For example, spirit worship and the cult of spirit possession, Zar, have for centuries lived side by side with Ethiopian Christianity, and the Church has done little to discourage them.

⁶Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. XIV.

spirits, as well as the practice of situating church shrines in remote almost inaccessible wooded grounds, are all African manifestations.

Despite the indigenous characteristic of the Ethiopian Church, its leadership at the highest level remained obeisant to the Egyptian Coptic Church for almost sixteen hundred years. Since the Alexandria-based appointment of the Syrian-born Abuna Salama as the first Axumite bishop, a precedent had been set by which the Ethiopian Church was placed under Egyptian jurisdiction. The practice had two negative consequences. First, following the death of the bishop in Ethiopia, it took years before a successor was dispatched from Egypt, especially in times of tensions between the two countries. Second, since the foreign-born bishop did not speak Ge'ez or Amharic, he could neither fully participate in day-to-day religious activities nor seriously appreciate the depth and complexity of the secular culture.⁷ Given his obvious handicaps in such practical matters, the actual administrative responsibility lay on the Itchege, the head priest at Debra-Libanos, Ethiopia's leading monastic center.⁸

The Egyptian Bishop, although mostly a figurehead,

⁷Haggai Erlich, "Identity and Church: Ethiopian-Egyptian Dialogue," International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 32 (2000), p. 25.

⁸Abuna Paulos, Brief Life History of His Holiness Patriarch Theophilos (Addis Ababa: Holy Trinity College, 1995), pp. 119-20.

remained nonetheless very powerful, theoretically more powerful than the monarch, for he had the authority to excommunicate. Naturally, the investiture of such absolute power on a foreign cleric went against the spirit of national independence. Between the 1860s and the 1920s, Ethiopian leaders tried to scale down Egypt's religious foothold over their country, but found they were fighting against a well-entrenched and time-honored national tradition. What finally made Ethiopia's religious dependence on Alexandria unacceptable was the controversial role of Abuna Kerilos during the 1935-36 Italo-Ethiopian war. The Addis Ababa-based Egyptian bishop not only failed to condemn the fascist aggression, but he also traveled to Rome to discuss the fate of the Ethiopian Church with Mussolini.⁹

A long and protracted negotiation between Cairo and Addis Ababa on church matters began in 1942. Driven by the ongoing nationalist inertia and mindful of Kerilos's injurious role during the war, the Haile Selassie government proposed that the Ethiopian Church be recognized as an autocephalic body with its own bishops and archbishops. Initially, the proposal was met with stiff resistance by Alexandria. But given the threat of a unilateral action by the Ethiopian government, the latter was forced to compromise. In 1948 five Ethiopians were appointed as

⁹Erlich, "Identity and Church," pp. 26-30.

bishops, among them the Itchege Gebre-Giorgis, whom the Holy See recognized as archbishop (or Abuna) in 1951.¹⁰ With the 1959 consecration of the Abuna as Patriarch Basilios, the EOC thus achieved total independence in name as well as in fact, not least of which was the power to choose and anoint its own patriarchs and bishops. In 1971 Abuna Theophilos became the first Ethiopian priest to be consecrated as patriarch by the Holy Synod without having to leave his country for Egypt.¹¹

West Indian and black American love affairs with Ethiopia preceded the post-war developments discussed above. Ethiopia's mention in the Scriptures, coupled with a rich and ancient biblical tradition, was in itself sufficient enough to arouse positive racial interest in the far off country. Marcus Garvey, the long-time proponent of Ethiopianism, thus articulated the above sentiment when he said: "We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God-- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, the One God of all ages. That is the God in whom we believe, but we shall worship Him through the spectacles of Ethiopia."¹² Garvey's organization adopted as its official song, "the UNIA Universal Ethiopian Anthem," whose words began as "Ethiopia,

¹⁰Ibid pp. 33-46.

¹¹Paulos, Theophilos pp. 119-20 and pp. 123-25.

¹²Amy Jacques Garvey, ed., Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 44.

thou land of our fathers, Thou land where the gods loved to be."¹³

There is some evidence indicative of an attachment to Ethiopian Christianity long before the advent of Garveyism. One of the oldest black churches in North America is known as the Abyssinian Baptist Church. Legend has it that the Abyssinian Baptist Church was founded by a group of "Abyssinian traders" who, tired of being segregated by white congregations, decided to form their own house of worship. Led by Rev. Thomas Paul of Boston, in 1809 they established one of the first independent black religious institutions in New York, the Abyssinian Baptist Church.¹⁴

There is no corroborative historical account about Northeast Africans coming to the Americas as slaves let alone as merchants. The above story must have therefore emerged from the need to lend legitimacy to the Abyssinian Baptists' claim of being the first African-oriented Church in the U.S., in name as well as in fact. Even if the above myth has been a recent embellishment, the adoption of the name "Abyssinian" by one of the oldest independent black churches suggests that some antebellum African-Americans already knew about the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Thus, throughout the nineteenth

¹³Kenneth King, "Arnold J. Ford's 'Universal Ethiopian Hymnal'" Ethiopia Observer 15, 4 (1972), pp. 246-47.

¹⁴Leroy Fitts, A History of the Black Baptists (Nashville, Tennessee: Roadman Press, 1985), pp. 46-47.

century, Christianity seems to have remained Ethiopia's salient feature among diasporic Africans, especially since it offered a positive contrast to the "heathen Africa" image.

Edward Wilmot Blyden, the renowned Caribbean-born ardent pan-Africanist, was the first diasporan thinker to write on the Ethiopian Church. Blyden's exposition on Ethiopia, "Philip and the Eunuch," appeared in his collection of essays, Islam, Christianity and the Negro Race, first published in 1887. In this work Blyden condemned the use of white missionaries in Africa as culturally and psychologically counterproductive. Western evangelists, he argued, inculcated European values and virtues, most of which ran contrary to African traditions.¹⁵

Given his disenchantment with European evangelism, the Caribbean scholar turned to the Ethiopian Church in search of a homegrown and authentically African religious institution. "It is a curious fact that historians, in speaking of the African Church, seldom mean by that phrase the Abyssinian Church, which is far more entitled to that description than any other."¹⁶ The encounter in the Holy Land between the Ethiopian eunuch and Philip the apostle was not only divine inspired, Blyden continued, but it created the setting for

¹⁵Edward Wilmot Blyden, Islam, Christianity and the Negro Race (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967).

¹⁶Ibid p. 164.

the introduction of the new faith to Africa by an African. The newly baptized court official returned to Ethiopia bearing the new gospel, and with that Christianity eventually grew into an indigenous institution. "The Abyssinian Church is the only real African church yet founded whose priests and people are all of the African race."¹⁷

Religion and Foreign Policy

On the Ethiopian side, the predisposing factors to the transplantation of the Ethiopian Faith in the West were more political than religious, at least at the initial stage. As one of the few Africans never to be colonized, Ethiopians had been slow to develop a pan-black racial consciousness. What finally galvanized Ethiopia's social and psychological integration with the continent was Haile Selassie's multi-pronged, Africa-oriented policy: his identification with the anti-colonial cause, his decisive role in the founding of the OAU and his promotion of the EOC as a cultural bridge between Ethiopia and New World blacks.¹⁸

EOC's overseas expansion was, in this respect, a manifestation of the increasing globalization process of the once conservative and parochial institution. EOC's

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸See "Bond without Blood," ch. 3.

interaction with overseas church bodies strengthened Ethiopia's ecumenical interest, which in turn instigated a global-oriented thinking in keeping with Haile Selassie's post-war policy of modernization. Beginning from 1948 when Ethiopia became one of the founding members of the World Council of Churches, this globalization trend continued through the fifties and sixties with the EOC projecting itself ever more boldly in world affairs.¹⁹

The mastermind behind Ethiopia's growing involvement in international Christian brotherhood was Abuna Theophilos, the country's most influential religious figure. Born in the province of Gojjam around 1910, Meliktu Wolde-Mariam, later Archbishop and then Patriarch Theophilos, grew up in Addis Ababa where he distinguished himself as a gifted religious scholar. In 1948 the 38-year-old Meliktu was raised to the level of a bishop in charge of the eastern province of Hararge, the emperor's birth place, and in the same year took his first trip abroad as a representative to the WCC conference in Amsterdam. Theophilos became a well-traveled figure in subsequent decades, attending major international gatherings and serving twice as one of the three presidents of the All African Conference of Churches.²⁰

If Haile Selassie sought to transform Addis Ababa into

¹⁹Paulos, Theophilos pp. 121-33.

²⁰Ibid.

Africa's political capital, Theophilos likewise endeavored to make Ethiopia the continent's spiritual center. In January 1971 Ethiopia hosted the 23rd Central Committee annual meeting of the WCC. Theophilos, then acting patriarch, used the ecumenical platform to advance Africa's anti-colonial cause, his opening speech setting the tone of the conference as follows:

In meeting on the African continent there are certain problems that automatically loom large on the Committee's horizon--problems relating to questions of human dignity, justice and freedom, problems that no sincere Christian can afford to ignore. In raising these issues, I should make it clear that, as Christians of Africa, our concern is for justice for all people, irrespective of race, color or creed. The dehumanizing factors to which people are subjected by means of poverty and backwardness, on the one hand, and discrimination based on race, color or creed, on the other, are indeed against the teachings of Christ and the faith of the Church. Every effort should be made, therefore, to eradicate them. We hope that the present meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches will put its considerable weight on the side of the oppressed peoples of this continent, and help heal the wounds that still continue to bleed.²¹

The WCC conference in Addis Ababa, the first ever held in an African capital, marked the beginning of a positive engagement between the world church body and the various anti-colonial struggles. The assembly was particularly significant in its deliberation on pertinent issues such as apartheid, institutional racism and North-South economic

²¹"Official Welcome by His Bettitude Abuna Theophilos," Ecumenical Review 23, 2 (April 1971), pp. 169-71.

disparity.²² The gathering's major long-term impact lay in its recognition of armed struggle as an acceptable course against evil, especially in totalitarian regimes where nonviolent forms of protest were simply impossible. In a carefully argued subsequent publication, the WCC upheld the right to resort to arms for a just cause as long as all peaceful options had been tried and failed. This provided the philosophical underpinning by which the various anti-colonial movements in southern Africa, particularly ANC and ZANU, were able to muster financial and political support among religious groups in the West.²³

Ethiopianism and Liberation Theology

If pan-Africanism and globalization explain Ethiopia's interest in the country's overseas religious expansion, on the Caribbean side the coming of the EOC can be understood as having resulted from a dialectical interplay between oppression and resistance. During slavery and after, New World blacks looked to the Bible on the one hand as a source of spiritual inspiration, and to Africa on the other as a source of ancestral pride. Connected with this latter view

²²"CCIA Recommendations on Human Rights," Ibid p. 172.

²³Ernest Payne, "Violence, Non-Violence and Human Rights," Ecumenical Review 23, 3 (July 1971), pp. 222-36.

was the concept of Ethiopianism: the realization of Ethiopia as an ancient Christian polity; the regard of the country as the cradle of human civilization; and the appreciation of its victory over Italy at Adwa as a symbol of African military prowess.²⁴

Because of Ethiopia's special place in the Scriptures and because of its aura as Africa's oldest independent nation, many blacks saw the Apostolic Church as the institutional embodiment of race pride and spiritual fulfillment. For the Caribbean working class who bore the brunt of colonial racism and class discrimination, Ethiopianism therefore constituted a liberation theology, an ideology of resistance against political domination as well as a blue-print of religious and cultural decolonization.²⁵

Understandably, therefore, the first Western proselytes to African Orthodoxy belonged to the working class. In Trinidad and Tobago, where the ancient Church first took roots in the West, ex-members of the defunct UNIA and related movements made up the first converts. As Millett stated, "almost all those who worked to bring the Church to Trinidad and Tobago were Garveyites. Garveyism gave them a certain

²⁴For a discussion on Caribbean Ethiopianism, see Ken Post, "The Bible as Ideology: Ethiopianism in Jamaica, 1930-1938," pp. 185-207.

²⁵Ibid.

mind-set and certain distinctive attitudes."²⁶

The Spiritual Baptists and the Ethiopian Coptic Church

One of the various Garveyite movements that surfaced in Trinidad in the aftermath of World War II was the Universal African Pioneering Association. As the name implied, the UAPA fashioned itself after Garvey's UNIA, a populous grassroots movement with millions of followers in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Formed in 1947 by David Modeste and Garnett Springer, president and vice president respectively, the UAPA would serve as the prelude to the introduction of the Ethiopian Coptic Church.

Springer and Modeste were born in central Trinidad to immigrant Catholic families from Grenada and Barbados. With limited formal education, both derived their Africa-oriented identity from their association with the Spiritual Baptists, a sect halfway between a West African traditional religion and mainstream Christianity. The Spiritual Baptists were composed of mainly working class Afro-Trinidadians, most of whom held pro-African religious inclinations. Also known as Shouters because of their loud and spontaneous style of worship, the Spiritual Baptists were often shunned or stigmatized, their religious practices often associated with

²⁶Millett, "Brief History of the EOC in TT," p. 28.

the underground occult.²⁷

Since slaves had always greatly outnumbered white settlers, there had always been an overt African cultural presence in the West Indies. Even with the systematic assimilation of blacks into Christianity, certain African cultural institutions continued to flourish in reinterpreted forms: Vodun in Haiti, Kumina in Jamaica, Santeria in Cuba, Shango or Orisha in Trinidad. The last, according to a classic study by George Simpson, is based on the worship of a pantheon of Yoruba deities of which Shango, god of thunder and lightening, is one of a dozen of powers. While retaining its original Yoruban structure, New World Orisha incorporated Catholic saints and angels into its multitude of supernatural beings. It also combined traditional practices of healing and conjuration with elements of Christianity, including the use of the Bible for purposes of divination.²⁸

Cosmopolitanism and Western education gradually undermined the religious basis of Orisha and its polytheistic beliefs.²⁹ Most of its followers were drawn to Catholicism or to the Spiritual Baptists even if they continued occasionally to attend covert Shango meetings and consult with Shango

²⁷George Eaton Simpson, The Shango Cult of Trinidad (Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1965), see ch. 2.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid pp. 116-18 and 128.

priests and priestesses in private. As one informant recounted to Simpson, "'You can be a Baptist, a Spiritual Baptist, and believe in Orisha work. You can be a Catholic and believe in Orisha work. But the Catholics turn you out if they find out you are Orisha. The Spiritual Baptists don't care if you go to an Orisha work.'"³⁰

In other words, Spiritual Baptists constituted a refined form of Shangoism with an overtone of Pentecostalism, hence their mutual tolerance. Some of the most obvious Shango influences on the Shouters were spirit possession, various water rituals including baptism and head washing, animal sacrifice and offering, and the attachment of great importance to dreams and divination.³¹

Modeste, 1908-1970, had a dream in the traditional Baptist fashion in which he felt his calling. Miller writes:

In 1935 Modeste had a dream and in that dream he was advised to go and gather all the nations. Modeste interpreted this to be a call for unity among African-Trinidadian believers. Being a Spiritual Baptist, he decided the first port of call would be the Baptist Churches. He therefore went from village to village, wherever Baptists could be found, and urged them to join him in his crusade to bring the faith of their fathers to the land of their birth. He felt he had to bring the faith to his people so that they would know themselves. He also sought to attract African-Trinidadian members of the Roman Catholic faith because he was born and grew up as a member of the Catholic faith. To help accomplish his

³⁰Ibid p. 116.

³¹Ibid pp. 114-16.

objective, David Modeste also founded the African Nationalist Movement, an intermediate step leading to his involvement with Garveyism.³²

A similar providential explanation is put forth by Springer for his subsequent immersion in religion. Precocious childhood and repeated mystical experiences had imbued in Springer a strong sense of mission at an early age. Born supposedly with fully-grown teeth and long hair, he was gifted with the unique ability of foreseeing into the future. At the age of six he had a foreboding dream about the death of his otherwise healthy mother and the dream turned out to be real some weeks later. Then came his vision in 1944 at the age of eighteen while still a secondary school student. It all started when the teenage Garnett eavesdropped on a casual discussion in a neighborhood pub about the impossibility of reading the Bible from cover to cover within three weeks without losing one's sanity. The challenge was irresistible, and in less than three weeks the youth read the entire text from Genesis to Revelation.³³

Reading it I was able to see how Hitler's war would end. I was able to see India getting her independence. I was able to see the return of Israel and the conflict between Israel and the Arabs. I was able to see the dismantling of the British Empire. I was able to see all the African states gaining their independence and every ethnic group seeking its language. And I told myself that

³²Millett, "Brief History of the EOC in TT," p. 55.

³³Interview with Garnet Springer: December 21, 1996; and January 4, 1997..

I will have to be part of this.³⁴

So overwhelmed was Springer by his extraordinary experience that he fell out with his father because of his decision to leave school. "An aunt of mine said: 'what are you going to do?' I said 'I have to see that our people get back their language and culture.'" The aunt introduced Springer to David Modeste, a construction worker who dabbled as a Garveyite preacher and a part-time salesperson for the Caribe Herald: a local paper that regularly reprinted Sylvia Pankhurst's militant articles on Africa. Impressed by Springer's potential as an orator, Modeste agreed to work with the young man. Together, the two traversed the island, spreading Garvey's teachings and often citing the redemptive verse of Psalm 68 as proof of Africa's impending preeminence: "Ethiopia shall soon stretch her hands unto God."³⁵

According to their own self perceptions, Modeste and Springer were thus beckoned to a special mission by the Holy Spirit that communicated itself through dreams and visions. Their conviction in a sense takes on a providential dimension in which myths and facts contrive together to project a divinely-inspired sense of purpose and destiny. Their stories, however apocryphal, reflect the psychology of a culture: its preoccupation with mysticism and the

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

supernatural. What is important about these stories is not their authenticity: whether or not Modeste and Springer actually experienced what they claimed. What is crucial is the fact that these stories were a small part of a larger cultural package by which the two activists publicized as well as legitimized their cause.

Following the establishment of the UAPa in 1947, incidentally the year of India's independence, Springer and Modeste began to get island-wide notice. They were joined by a Nigerian student from one of the local colleges who volunteered to offer classes in the Yoruba language to their followers. A certain Davidson Kwati Arthur who, in his correspondence with the UAPA, identified himself as bishop Mar Lukas of the Ethiopian Coptic Church, was also brought from West Africa to serve as the movement's spiritual figurehead. The arrival of the African priest was in line with the UAPA's practice of treating politics and religion as the two sides of a coin. But what the Trinidadians did not anticipate was that the coming of Arthur, best known as Mar Lukas, was bound to tilt the balance between politics and religion in favor of the latter.

According to Springer, who later became a close confidant of the West African, Mar Lukas was a Ghanian by birth but had lived for several years in Nigeria. An Anglican by upbringing, the Ghanian had allegedly spent some time in

Egypt learning the rituals and customs of the Coptic Church. After returning to West Africa, conceivably in the midst of the Italo-Ethiopian war, Mar Lukas settled in Nigeria where he founded the Ethiopian Coptic Church, ECC.³⁶

Since no one in Trinidad knew the exact rituals and doctrines of the Ethiopian Church, the authenticity of Mar Lukas' religious affiliation with Ethiopia went unquestioned. In fact, the West African's presence turned the ECC into a fast growing sect, with branches in the nearby island of Tobago and the British Guyana. Thousands came forth to be baptized as converts, Springer and Modeste the first to be ordained as priests. Mar Lukas might have come to Trinidad to meet the need for a spiritual connection with Africa. But his arrival heralded the end of the UAPA as a socio-political movement, opening instead a new religious chapter in Caribbean history: the chapter of the Ethiopian Church.

Of equally fortuitous significance to the growth of the new sect was the 1951 visit to TT and Guyana by a prominent Ethiopian. Fr. Gebre-Yesus Hailu, a Catholic priest living in Rome, was on a mission to New York when Springer and his associates learned about him through a local paper.³⁷

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Dr. Aba Gebre-Yesus Hailu, an Italian-educated Eritrean, was one of the most persuasive advocates of Ethiopian-Eritrean unity. His presence in New York in 1950-51 was more likely in connection with the Ethiopian foreign ministry and his role as an articulate pro-unity lobbyist.

Believing from his title that Hailu was an Orthodox priest, the ECC activists sent him an invitation covering all expenses. Despite being wrongly identified as a high-ranking Orthodox priest of royal birth, the Eritrean-born Hailu visited TT and Guyana and his presence helped authenticate the stature of the African Church.³⁸

When nothing came of Hailu's promise to help facilitate a direct connection between the ECC and the EOC, as a last resort the ECC decided to send Springer and Mar Lukas as emissaries to Ethiopia. Equipped with a letter of introduction from Ras Imru, the Ethiopian ambassador in Washington, the two arrived to an official welcome in Addis Ababa on August 6, 1952.³⁹ They were lodged at the Itege Hotel, and a government Jeep and a chauffeur were placed at their disposal. Their first acquaintances in the capital included members of the small West Indian community, among them the well-connected David Talbot. "His eminence, Most Excellency Rev. Dr. Mar Monsignor Lukas and his Chaplain the Rev. Springer of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Western dispensation outside Ethiopia, arrived here by train," Talbot

See Getachew Haile and others, The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia: Papers from a Symposium on the Impact of European Missions on Ethiopian Society (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p.134.

³⁸Yesehaq Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 197-98.

³⁹Interview with Garnet Springer.

reported in the Herald afterwards. "His Eminence Monsignor Lukas is founder and Primate of his branch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which embraces West Africa, the British West Indies and British Guyana. . . . His Eminence was received by His Majesty the Emperor last Wednesday in the afternoon."⁴⁰

In their meetings with the emperor and church officials, Springer and Mar Lukas requested for the incorporation of the ECC into the EOC; the recognition of Mar Lukas as a bishop; the training of West Indians as deacons and priests in Ethiopia; the construction of an Ethiopian Church cathedral and cultural center in Trinidad; the deployment of student exchange programs as well as the opening of consular ties between the two countries.⁴¹

Since the proposal dealt with more than just ecclesiastical matters, it had to pass for further scrutiny by the Board of Education, the branch of government concerned with cultural and social issues. Judging from the type of points raised in the petition, it was clear that the West Indians had overestimated the government's evangelical commitment and fiscal resources. They had, moreover, overlooked, if little understood, the controversial nature of their proposal as it indirectly drew British involvement.

⁴⁰"West African Prelate Arrives in the Capital for Visit," Ethiopian Herald August 23, 1952.

⁴¹Millett, "Brief History of the EOC in TT," p. 62.

Trinidad was still a British colony, and the document's implementation by the Ethiopian government would have meant an overt affront to the Colonial Office in London. With such concerns in mind, the Board agreed to send a two-man "fact finding mission prior to any formal commitment. In October Mar Lukas and Springer were back on the sea, homebound, accompanied by the two Ethiopian envoys, Ato Abera Jembere and Fr. Gebre-Yesus Meshesha.⁴²

On the sixteenth of December, a date that has since marked the formal entry of the EOC to the Western Hemisphere, the four-man team disembarked to a euphoric welcome by hundreds of supporters in Port-of-Spain. The African mission caused certain uneasiness among wary colonial authorities. Nervous officials had in fact begun to crackdown on the ECC even before the Ethiopians' arrival. At least one sect activist, Neville London, was jailed in connection with his "missionary" activity with the ECC. London, a Guyanese immigrant, was arrested for overstaying his visa permit in Trinidad, hitherto never a serious immigration trespass. London's articulate defense during a deportation court hearing would catch the Guardian's attention: "I am in this country to do missionary work. . . . Any government who interferes with missionary work is not a Christian

⁴²Interview with Abera Jembere: August 2 and August 9, 1996.

government. You will not stop the Coptic Church. I am being persecuted for righteousness' sake."⁴³

Accompanied by Springer and Mar Lukas, Abera and Meshesha traveled throughout Trinidad, Tobago and British Guyana preaching, baptizing and even teaching Amharic. Because of the large throngs they attracted wherever they went, their actions were closely monitored for any signs of incitement. In Dutch Guyana, now Surinam, such fear of an anti-government insurrection would in fact result in the deportation of the Ethiopians and their associates back to British Guyana, whence they had come.⁴⁴

Abera returned to Ethiopia in the summer of 1953 with a written account on the mission's findings. . His report to the Board provoked two opposing responses. The more conservative members of the group saw the overseas missionary enterprise as too ambitious and costly, and suggested instead that such resources best be spent on the domestic expansion of Christianity. Their opponents, on the other hand, argued that the establishment of the EOC abroad would have a far reaching impact on Ethiopia's international prestige, and that it would even propel the country into an esteemed leadership role in the black world. Being in line with Haile

⁴³ "Removal Order Made against Cleric of Ethiopian Church," Trinidad Guardian November 7, 1952.

⁴⁴Interview with Abera.

Selassie's overall Africa-oriented policy, the latter view prevailed through majority vote, thus the decision to start an overseas branch of the Church.⁴⁵

A two-way interaction had at last begun between Ethiopia and the archipelago, thanks to the dogged determination and perseverance of the pioneering fathers. Meshesha replaced Mar Lukas, whose role as an imposter had long since been revealed, as the official person in charge of the diocese in Trinidad and Tobago, while Fr. Gebre-Igziabiher Degou,⁴⁶ another Ethiopian evangelist, arrived to head a similar mission in the nearby Guyana. The name Ethiopian Coptic Church was likewise abandoned in favor of the more appropriate Ethiopian Orthodox Church.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶In Ethiopian church tradition every child receives a baptismal name during baptism. Baptismal names are normally hyphenated words. The suffix is a pronoun: the name of a patron saint. The prefix describes the baptizee's relationship to the saint, mostly a biblical character. Gebre-Yesus means the slave of Jesus, Gebre-Igziabiher the slave of God, Haile-Selassie the power of the Trinity, Haile-Mariam the power of Mary, Wolde-Gabriel the son of Gabriel, etc. Baptismal names are invoked in special circumstances such as when one is being prayed for by a priest. Church clerics on the other hand prefer to stick to their baptismal names as their sir names. To avoid long and difficult to pronounce hyphenated sir names, as in the case of the priests, some of the personalities in this chapter are referred to by their last names: Degou instead of Gebre-Igziabiher, Meshesha instead of Gebre-Yesus, etc.

⁴⁷Interview with Abera.

The Early Phase of the Overseas Mission: 1952-1959

The Church saw its fastest growth in the early 1950s. According to Yesehaq, in 1954 a parcel of land was purchased by the pro-Ethiopian congregation at Arouka, which later became the site for the EOC headquarters for the entire Caribbean region. At Claxton Bay, Sangre Grande, Point Fortin and Scarborough, Tobago, similar plots were already acquired and Church buildings erected.⁴⁸

The branches in Guyana and TT gained legal recognition as independent religious bodies by acts of parliament in 1955 and 1956 respectively.⁴⁹ A letter to the Patriarchate by a Guyanese activist casts some light on the incorporation process of the infant Church. The letter also reveals the general condition of the Church in the first few years of its founding and is therefore worth quoting a portion of it here.

By now, you {Abuna Basilios} will have learned that the prayers of your people in this distant land have been answered. We have, with God's help, been able to achieve the incorporation of the British Guyana Mission of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. . . . Your letter to the Governor of the Colony was taken to him by Dr. C. H. Denbow who arranged that, at a convenient time, His Excellency the Governor would receive the Reverends Meshesha and Degou in audience. Dr. Denbow then interviewed the Honorable Attorney General of the Colony of the British Guyana who, not only gave a valuable advice, but also helped

⁴⁸Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church pp. 197-98.

⁴⁹Millett: "Brief History of the EOC in TT," pp. 67-68.

in drafting the necessary legal instructions for the incorporation of the Church. At this time, the priests were received in audience by the Governor. They were escorted by Dr. Denbow and were given a very cordial interview by the Governor, Sir Alfred Savage, who recalled having met you in Jerusalem where he was in Finance Department during the War.⁵⁰

The letter went on to inform the Abuna of current conditions and future plans of the infant Church:

We have nine active branches at present, separated by great distances. Fr. Meshesha is in the neighboring island of Trinidad, and Fr. Degou is here with us. He has to conduct services, baptisms, and teach Amharic. The various branches are clamoring for his service. The members want him in several places at the same time. We beg of Thee to send us more priests and teachers. Our people are poor but they are willing. . . . We need the prayers as well as the material support of the mother Church.⁵¹

The letter concluded by expressing the Church's interest to participate in the forthcoming silver jubilee celebration, the 25th anniversary of Haile Selassie's enthronement:

The Silver Jubilee of His Imperial Majesty would take place in November-December of this year. We are desirous of sending two delegates from the Church in these parts. Our objective is that, by their presence in Ethiopia, they will be able to present to the mother Church a timely picture of our position here. . . . We are requesting that you assist us with their return passage and accommodation for one week in Addis Ababa.⁵²

⁵⁰Claude Jonas to Abuna Basilios: August 11, 1955, EOC file number (henceforth EOC) 5811.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

The above letter reveals three important points worth noting. First, it shows the speedy progress the Church made under a favorable colonial government, at least in the case of Guyana. Second, it demonstrates the leadership's genuine enthusiasm and commitment, as in its attempt to send delegates to Africa to take part in the jubilee fanfare. Third, the letter reveals that the infant church had limited resources and looked toward the mother church for financial support. It should be noted here that no help came forth from the Patriarchate for the proposed trip to Ethiopia and the travel plan never materialized. Disparity between what the converts' expected materially and what the Patriarchate was able to provide would in the long term pose a major problem for the entire overseas mission. It would induce many members to revert to the relatively more affluent Eurocentric denominations with which they long had been familiar.⁵³

Even though the first few years pose the most critical period in the transplantation of any religion, in the Caribbean the EOC held its own because it met the psychological and spiritual needs of its followers. In Guyana its converts came from the urban-based Afro-Guyanese rank and file; in Jamaica, as will be shown in subsequent pages, from the Rastafarian circles; and in TT from nationalist

⁵³Abuna Basilios to Gebre-Igziabiher Degou: September 13, 1948 EC, EOC 1292.

Garveyites and Butlerites.⁵⁴ To these color and class-conscious groups, the EOC represented an emblem of race pride and an expression of cultural and religious nationalism.⁵⁵

Another explanation why the EOC made a rapid inroad in a relatively short period lay in the fact that its rituals and beliefs in some ways resembled those of the Afro-Caribbean revivalist sects. Similarities between Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and the Spiritual Baptists were evident in their practice of animal sacrifice and water baptism, for example.⁵⁶ In both traditions dreams were taken so seriously that individuals went to great lengths to have them interpreted by specialists. Spirit possession was a powerful social phenomenon in either case, even if its manifestations were different.

In Ethiopia, spirit possession may refer to possession by a demon, a calamitous condition that calls for an exorcist, preferably a priest; or it may refer to the state

⁵⁴Tubal Uriah Butler had gained national prominence as a leader in the 1937 labor revolt, the catalyst to various socio-economic reforms in TT. During the Italo-Ethiopian war, Butler championed the Ethiopian cause. As a member of the ECC, he was among the hundreds who welcomed Meshesha and Jembere when they first landed on the island. He also used his influence as a member of the Trinidad's Legislative Council to help pass the bill under which the Church received legal recognition. See Jacobs, Butler Versus the King p. 68 and 193; Millett: Brief History of the EOC in TT, p. 64.

⁵⁵Millett: "Brief History of the EOC in TT," p. 64.

⁵⁶For an elaborate discussion on Shango rituals regarding sacrifice, offering and baptism, see Simpson, Shango ch. 3.

of entrancement of an individual when she or he is taken hold of by a wild spirit or Zar. In the case of the Spiritual Baptists, it is often the Holy Ghost that takes control over the individual. However, for Shouters who also dabble as Shangoists, possession can be carried out by one of the various gods similar to that of a Zar possession in Ethiopia.⁵⁷

Possession by a Zar spirit, or an Orisha god, goes against church tenets. But far from facing public ostracism, those possessed serve important social and psychological needs as mediums between the two worlds: the real and the supernatural. Through them others may seek cures for ailments, learn the reasons behind a mishap, discover remedies for personal or family crises, and communicate their wishes or requests to the spirits.⁵⁸

to have a more complete picture of the expansion process of the EOC, and to assess its strengths and weaknesses, it is critical to examine the role of the leadership personalities and the constraints under which they operated. Born in the province of Wollo at the turn of the century, Meshesha grew up in the monastic centers of northern Ethiopia. Although well versed in traditional church training, he did not have access to Western-style secular

⁵⁷Ibid pp. 28-35.

⁵⁸Ibid.

education. Interest in Asceticism led him to Jerusalem where he lived for several years as a monk in the EOC monastery. He was still in Jerusalem when the second Italo-Ethiopian hostility broke out but soon left for England to serve as the chaplain for the wartime Ethiopian community there.⁵⁹ Because of his limited contact with the mainstream society, the stay in England did not necessarily familiarize Meshesha with the outside world. His overseas experience was nonetheless deemed significant enough to warrant his appointment in the West Indies after the war.

Meshesha's letters from Trinidad indicate that he made few contacts outside his immediate environment. Because of the language barrier, he had to limit his liturgical role to administering the sacrament or leading prayer services. This meant he had to delegate most of the actual evangelical work to his local-born lieutenants, particularly to Springer and Modeste.⁶⁰ In his letter of January 1954, which was characteristic of most of his correspondence, he talked briefly of Mar Lukas's increasing marginalization, as well as of the Christmas celebration at Arouka supposedly attended by a crowd of five hundred. Three-fourths of the letter dwelt with his financial problems and his need for a car.

⁵⁹For a biographical sketch on Meshesha, see "Ye Bitsuh Abuna Athanasius Ye Hiwet Tarik," Dimtse Tewahedo March 30, 1975 EC.

⁶⁰Interview with Springer.

"My status in the Colony is not different from that of a bishop," he wrote. "I have three preachers--Springer, Modeste and Adams--who live with me for the most part, and it is I who pays for their food and lodging, as well as for their transportation when we travel." The clergyman went on to complain about the hot climate and the fast traffic which often left him feeling sick and dizzy. "No self-respecting priest in this country is without a car," he continued. "Whenever my hopeful followers ask me why I have no private transportation, I tell them I will soon own one. . . . Lest my poverty becomes a disgrace to my country's esteemed name, may your Holiness send me the funds for a new car together with my salary?"⁶¹

Even after receiving the necessary funds that enabled him to buy a used automobile,⁶² Meshesha's correspondence dealt mainly with financial issues. In one letter, in which he complained about the expenses incurred during a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he asked for money to renovate and furnish his church, even though that would have been the

⁶¹Gebre-Yesus Meshesha to Abuna Basilios: January 10, 1946 EC, EOC 1292. Translated into English by the author.

⁶²In 1959 EC Meshesha received four thousand Birr for a used automobile. Having been elevated to the status of a bishop a year later, he received another twelve thousand Birr for a new vehicle. Patriarchate to Meshesha: October 7, 1959 EC, EOC, 1292. Ministry of Pen to Patriarchate: July 15, 1960 EC, EOC 1292.

responsibility of his parishioners.⁶³ In general, so preoccupied was Meshesha with the immediate and the mundane, he lost sight of the long-term interest of his diocese, such as the setting of self-help schemes and the expansion of the missionary work.

Degou could not have been any more different in his personality and leadership style. Meshesha's junior by about twenty years, the Gondar-born Degou had modern as well as traditional schooling, spoke good English and knew how to work with local officials. Then, too, was his acceptance of his missionary assignment with a genuine sense of commitment and not just as a mere patriotic duty. A letter he wrote to the vice Patriarch in Ethiopia while en route to Trinidad reveals a humble yet optimistic man-at-arms. He did not know what awaited him in the new land and was not without some worries, he confessed, but then added that he was prepared to face whatever challenges lay ahead with courage and happiness: "I do not have much to say in this letter; but may I throw myself on your feet and beg for your blessing and support as I set out for my mission?"⁶⁴

Other than his secular education at the Tefari Makonnen School, Degou was even less exposed to the West than

⁶³Athanasius to Patriarchate: September 16, 1965 EC, EOC 2546.

⁶⁴Gebre-Igziabiher Degou to Archbishop Theophilos: December 27, 1947 EC, EOC 2687.

Meshesha. His experience at Walduba, a major monastic center in the country, was nowhere comparable to what Meshesha learned from his stay in Jerusalem and England. All the same, Degou arrived in Guyana with a single-minded determination and youthful enthusiasm, and the only complaint of his parishioners was that they did not have many more like him.⁶⁵

Degou's presence transformed the diocese in the South American colony as EOC's first legally recognized overseas branch. His leadership success lay, among other points, in his ability to pick up new ideas. His adoption of Garvey's Afrocentric rhetoric made him a popular religious orator not only in Guyana but in Trinidad and Tobago as well. In his 1959 Christmas Day sermon, for example, he announced that "the three Wise Men who brought gifts to the Christ Child were Ethiopians," Ethiopia being a generic name for Africa. He spoke to a crowd of people that included newspaper reporters and government dignitaries like John Donaldson, the Minister of Communication and Works. A newspaper account of the occasion appeared two days later in the Trinidad Chronicle:

The head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Trinidad issued a challenge at Mayaro on Sunday. He declared that the three Wise Men who brought gifts to the Christ Child were Ethiopians. "If you deny this, bring proof. This is no exaggeration, no boasting. Investigate for yourselves and find

⁶⁵Claude Jonas to Abuna Basilios: August 11, 1955, EOC 5811.

out."⁶⁶

From the article it was clear that Degou made a favorable impression on the reporter, for the latter continued to write:

The Reverend Fr. E. Degou, Ethiopian-born priest, stood on a makeshift pulpit, a stone throw from the popular resort bathing beach, and held service with hundreds of his faithful flock as they celebrated the Ethiopian Christmas five days later, so that those who were working could find time to celebrate. Looking picturesque in his multi-colored robe, the 32-year-old priest warned in his musical accent that he was not being racial. "This is history. If you have money, go to Ethiopia and see the monument of the Queen of Sheba there. This is a proof that the Wise Men came from Egypt. We have no need to produce other proofs. It is up to any believer to bring his own proof to the contrary. . . . You have heard catalysts boasting that Rome is the seat of Peter. Then we should boast that Egypt is the seat of Christ. The Baby Christ fled and stayed in Egypt till Herod died."⁶⁷

If the Media's frequent but erroneous allusion to Degou as the head priest aroused some resentment on his colleague, Meshesha was too self-conscious to let that out in public. To the contrary, notwithstanding personality differences, or even possible behind-the-scene rivalries, the two complemented each other in their distinctly different public personas. Meshesha, despite his laconic leadership mentioned above, maintained a commanding presence as a patriarchal

⁶⁶"The Three Wise Men were Ethiopians," Trinidad Chronicle January 13, 1959.

⁶⁷Ibid.

figure, officiating over rituals and ceremonies. Degou, a flamboyant preacher, reached out to the masses from the pulpit and also served as the media's favorite liaison. As Ethiopians, moreover, both priests served a unique purpose by helping authenticate the West Indians' sense of connectedness with Africa. With that, the EOC in the New World made slow but steady progress, claiming as many as "seven thousand" converts in Trinidad and several thousands more in Tobago and Guyana by decade's end.⁶⁸

Expansion and Challenges: 1959-1966

Since the creation of the Ethiopian World Federation by Dr. Melaku Bayen in 1937, there had been many blacks in New York who held keen interest in Ethiopia in one form or another. such was the story of Fr. John Divine Hickerson, a long-standing EWF activist. Hickerson had, through a series of correspondence with Ethiopian church officials, established his version of the Ethiopian Church in Brooklyn, albeit of a Protestant congregation.⁶⁹

According to Yesehaq, Fr. Hickerson was "a man of vision who was responsible for the coming of the Church to the West." Among other things, it was through him that the

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 191.

Trinidadians came to know of Mar Lukas, the founder of the ECC there. In 1952, while en route to Trinidad, Abera and Meshesha also met with Hickerson in New York, presenting him with gifts from Ethiopia, "articles for the Church and sacrament books for the members." More importantly, they informed him of the EOC's plan to establish a formal presence in the United States in the near future.⁷⁰

"Then in 1954," writes Yesehaq, "Archbishop Theophilos visited the United States to reassure members that the promise would be kept, that the Church would be set up, and that he himself would return." Return he did, in October 1959, during which he baptized close to three hundred converts. Two parishes were established: Holy Trinity and St. Michael the Archangel. One convert, himself a preacher, donated his church at 720 Gates Street, Brooklyn, and the location became the seat of the St. Michael parish. The Holy Trinity was housed in a rented property. Until an arrangement was made for an Ethiopian priest to come to America, Bishop Y. Samuel of the Egyptian Coptic Church in New York agreed to serve as the churches' "spiritual advisor."⁷¹

In November the Archbishop flew from New York to TT where he ordained twelve deacons, Springer and Modeste among

⁷⁰Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 191. Interview with Abera.

⁷¹Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church pp. 191-92; Degou to Patriarchate: February 30, 1953 EC, EOC 2687.

them, and two priests: Kes Henry Blake and Kes Gebre-Yesus Turner. Unlike in New York, where few Americans outside the pro-African community showed interest in the Prelate's visit, in Trinidad his presence attracted close media attention and also revived the debate on African antiquity. In The Nation--the official mouthpiece of the Colony's major political party, the Peoples' National Movement--attention was given to the question of ancient Egypt's racial identity and to the nature of its links with Ethiopia. The Vice Patriarch upheld the view that Pharaonic Egypt constituted the pillar of African civilization along with Ethiopia. "It is known that Herodotus said point blank that the Egyptians came originally from Ethiopia," the paper went on. "The Bishop has informed us that in an Ethiopian legend . . . there were two brothers of one father: one of them founded Ethiopia and the other Egypt." Ethiopia and Egypt enjoyed a common history and blood kinship at least until the latter's conquest by various forces outside Africa: Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Turks.⁷²

Although Theophilos's 1959 visit brought the mother Church a step closer to its fledgling Western diocese, it had ominous results for the growth of the Ethiopian Church in the

⁷²"Ethiopia Shall Stretch forth her Hands," Nation: Organ of the Peoples' National Movement December 4, 1959. For a better understanding of Ethiopian Christianity and its history, the Archbishop donated a church "manuscript," excerpts of which were published in three weekly sequels. Titled "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church," the sequels appeared in the Nation's issues of Jan.8, Jan.22 and Jan.29, 1960.

Caribbean. The inclusion of New York as the Church's latest sphere of influence compromised the West Indians' monopoly of the overseas mission, and the effects were visible as early as 1960 with the transfer of Degou from Guyana to New York. Degou's removal left the missionary work in South America in a standstill. His position in Georgetown was for a time taken up by Aba Gebre-Hiwet. But Gebre-Hiwet lacked his predecessor's health and buoyancy, and in fact became the first Ethiopian priest to die while on duty in the New World.⁷³

For the newly founded diocese in New York, nothing could have been more opportune than the appointment of the vibrant Degou as its head priest. Having arrived in New York in September 1960, he proceeded to organize the administrative body of the Church, which consisted of a twenty-four-person general council and a seven-person board of trustees. He introduced the teaching of Amharic in Sunday school, and also created several interest groups: one for women, one for the youth, and one for outdoor evangelists. The last group was known as the Divine Army, which went from street to street preaching the Gospel and raising funds for the Church.⁷⁴

According to Degou's correspondence, in the two New

⁷³Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 200.

⁷⁴Degou to Patriarchate: February 30, 1953 EC, EOC 2687.

York branches, the parishes of St. Michael and the Holy Trinity, the faithful numbered no less than a thousand. The Church served as a sanctuary for many African students who sought warmth and solace in its bosom. African presence in the Church, Degou argued in his letter, bore immense significance to the EOC's missionary vision:

Presently, we have student members from Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Somalia. It is the conviction of these students that the Orthodox Faith become Africa's religion. Who knows, some of these members might hold important public offices when they return to their countries, as a result of which their joining our Church might in many ways benefit Ethiopia. . . . In the short term, the presence of Africans in our Church would help us gain more converts in the black community. Moreover, since there exists a pervasive belief about Ethiopians not wanting to be associated with blacks, our embrace of Africans would help offset such stereotypes.⁷⁵

But for all its far-sightedness and a clear sense of purpose, Degou's leadership was also a one man's show. When Degou left for Germany in 1963 to study theology, the mission in New York soon fell in disarray. In both parishes membership plummeted drastically, the St. Michael parish losing its premises for defaulting on its mortgage.⁷⁶ Even more demoralizing to the infant Church was the return to Ethiopia of the substitute priest under tragic circumstances.

⁷⁵Degou to Patriarchate: June 30, 1953 EC, EOC 2687. Translated into English by the author.

⁷⁶Degou (from Germany) to Patriarchate: November 1, 1963, EOC 2687. Memorandum from Lisanu Habte-Wold to Archbishop Theophilos: November 9, 1956 EC, EOC 2687.

Memihir Gebre-Selassie Haile-Mariam had just succeeded Degou when a quarrel with his landlady, a member of his congregation, resulted in a note of eviction. The frustrated priest tried to end his life by drowning himself in the icy Hudson River. Rescue came but not soon enough to reverse the water's hypothermic effect that resulted in the amputation of both legs.⁷⁷

The mid sixties therefore represented the lowest point in EOC's North American experience. Only the appointment of Laike-Mariam Mandefro, the longest serving EOC missionary to-date, would save the fledgling mission from possible extinction. Under Mandefro's leadership, revived interest in the Church would result in the establishment of a new center, the St. Gabriel Mission in Brooklyn⁷⁸ as well as in the relocation of the Holy Trinity parish into a newly purchased building in the Bronx.⁷⁹

The Royal Visit

The 1960s was a remarkable decade for the Third World

⁷⁷Interview with Yesehaq.

⁷⁸Mandefro to Theophilos: August 25, 1967, EOC 1292.

⁷⁹The building was purchased in 1969 through a government-guaranteed loan of 73,600 Birr, of which the sum of 66,018.91 Birr was still unpaid by 1982. See Patriarchate to Yesehaq: November 9, 1975 EC, EOC 1292.

as it marked the end of colonialism. In Africa, the "winds of change" not only swept the European powers out of the continent, but it also resulted in the creation of the OAU with its permanent headquarters in Ethiopia. Unlike the 1940s and the 1950s, the political developments of the early sixties brought no new stimuli to the Ethio-Caribbean religious dialogue. To the contrary, this period posed the Church in the West Indies its most critical challenge parallel to what was going on in New York.

The euphoric inertia of the fifties had run its course by the early sixties, and Internal squabbles over "seniority and nationality" had begun to take their toll. The vague criteria by which members were recently promoted to offices by the Vice Patriarch was specially sensitive for some. Springer and Modeste, the two founding members, were recognized as deacons while two of their junior colleagues were elevated to the level of priesthood. Adding to this complication was the fact that one of those two priests, Gebre-Yesus Turner, was a Jamaican national.⁸⁰

Personal rivalries, together with charges of moral and financial impropriety, created rift in the mission's leadership.⁸¹ Springer left for Barbados where he lived for several years in disassociation with the Church, while a

⁸⁰Millett, "Brief History of the EOC in TT," p. 67.

⁸¹Meshesha to Patriarchate: December 10, 1960, EOC 2687.

number of influential members like John Donaldson withdrew their supports from the mission quietly. Feeling disparaged by the turn of events, in 1963 Meshesha also left for Ethiopia for what then seemed to be an indefinite period of stay.⁸²

Two factors turned around the Church's ebbing fortune. First was the March 1964 visit to Ethiopia by Dr. Eric Williams, Trinidad and Tobago's first post-independence prime minister. Williams' visit, a prelude to the establishment of the Trinidadian embassy in Ethiopia, created a special moment in the two nations' diplomatic annals. From his decision to hold a half hour conference with Patriarch Basilios, it was clear the Prime Minister had calculated the political significance of his trip to his Ethiopia-centered constituents back home.⁸³ In the wake of the Prime Minister's visit, the Patriarchate sent a sum of three-thousand Birr for the recent hurricane victims in Tobago as a token of its renewed commitment to the faithful there.⁸⁴ Most importantly, Meshesha returned to his post at Arouka accompanied by two additional priests: Fikre-Mariam Warqneh, bound for Tobago, and Hadis Gidey, successor to the late Gebre-Hiwot in

⁸²Interview with Springer.

⁸³"Dr. Eric Williams Bids His Imperial Majesty Farewell," Ethiopian Herald March 19, 1964.

⁸⁴Patriarchate to Eric Williams: March 25, 1964, EOC 1292. Also Patriarchate to Williams May 28, 1964, EOC 1292.

Georgetown.⁸⁵

The second factor to boost the African Church morale in the West was Haile Selassie's April 1966 tour of the West Indies. The emperor's week-long travels in Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti marked the high point in the history of the Ethiopian-Caribbean connection. Each island's unparalleled lavish welcome, the extensive event-by-event media coverage of the tour, and the peoples' tumultuous outpour of love and adulation, made the monarch the most popular man of his time. For the Rastafarians of Jamaica he was the Messianic figure, a Christ reincarnate. For the rest, he was a mystical African king who, forsaken by the great powers in the thirties, stood as the only voice of international conscience and justice.

News of Haile Selassie's impending arrival to Trinidad and Tobago catapulted Meshesha and his church into national spotlight. For instance, of the several articles devoted to Ethiopia in the April 17 issue of the Trinidad Guardian, one focused entirely on the history of the EOC mission. "Ethiopia invaded Trinidad and Tobago about thirteen years ago. Not with armed warriors. Not with troops of conquest," it stated. The Ethiopians "came clutching the Cross, preaching the Gospel, and fired by a missionary zeal to unite all African brethren in one religious body." Ever since 1952, the article

⁸⁵See Simeneh Bekele (Patriarchate) to the Embassy of Trinidad and Tobago October 8, 1965 EC, EOC 1292.

added, the EOC has made "great strides in this country of many races and many creeds." The paper presented as fourteen thousand the total number of the EOC followers at the various branches: Arouka, Sangre Grande, Penal, Siparia, Oropouche, Parrylands, Point Fortin, Port-of-Spain, Claxton Bay, California, San Fernando, and Scarborough and Bel Garden in Tobago.⁸⁶

The royal visit added to the visibility of the African Church more than any other event before it. After the airport formality at Piarko, Haile Selassie and Eric Williams were motorcaded to the Medhane Church at Arouka for a prayer service in Amharic. Another church ceremony involving the emperor and the prime minister included the laying of a cornerstone for the construction of an Ethiopian cathedral on a government-provided lot in the outskirts of Port-of-Spain. Such media-oriented fanfares gave the Church a much wanted public exposure and brought to climax the longstanding religious love affairs between Afro-Trinidadians and the Ethiopian Church. If the landing of Jembere and Meshesha in Port-Of-Spain in 1952 marked the birth of the EOC in the West Indies, Haile Selassie's historic tour likewise reinforced the conviction that the Ethiopian Church was there to stay.⁸⁷

⁸⁶"They Came Clutching the Cross: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Makes Great Strides in Trinidad," Trinidad Guardian April 17, 1966.

⁸⁷Ethiopian Ministry of Information, Janhoy Be Karibian

The Church in the Greater Caribbean: 1970-1992

According to the previous sections, the Tewahedo Church arrived in the New World to meet a popular desire for an African faith by some of the Africa-oriented diaspora groups. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago the catalysts were local agents whose quest for an authentically African spiritual identity led them to Ethiopia. The establishment of the EOC in New York resulted from Archbishop Theophilos's visit, and the Ethiopian government could be credited as having taken the initiative. Only in Jamaica, the home of the Rastafarians, was the EOC invited simultaneously both by the populace and by the government.

Jamaican interest in Ethiopian Orthodoxy can be traced to the late fifties, more particularly to the letters of correspondence between Jamaican EWF activists and the Ethiopian Church. Such pro-Ethiopian sentiments at the streets level were in turn what prompted the government's expressed interest in the EOC for social and political reasons.⁸⁸

Desetoch (Addis Ababa, 1966), pp. 1-3; Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church pp. 197-98.

⁸⁸For the communication between grassroots Jamaican groups and the Patriarchate in Addis Ababa, see Smith, Rastafari Movement appendix II.

After a series of scandalous episodes involving the Rastafarians' desire for repatriation to Ethiopia, the Jamaican government launched a fact-finding mission to several countries in Africa to study the feasibility of migration.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, to help de-pressurize some of the boiling social tension in the pro-African urban ghettos, a letter was sent by Prime Minister Norman Manley inviting the EOC to come and establish branches.

In this country, Jamaica, there are tens of thousands of people who hold Ethiopia, its Sovereign, its Church and its Government in the highest esteem. The affection and reverence for the country is so great that many have adopted the belief that the Emperor Haile Selassie is a divine person." It is my firm opinion that there can be few places in the world where the ancient Apostolic Church in Ethiopia would make more rapid progress and would make a greater contribution to religious development based on the sacred principles on which the Church was founded. I speak on behalf of the Government of Jamaica when I invite Your Holiness to take steps to establish the Church in Jamaica. I do not believe that this can effectively be done by any local person attempting to create a local organization. I firmly believe that the hope of success will require that the Church should send a mission to Jamaica to start this great work. I give the assurance that such a mission would be welcomed by the Government and by the people and would do great deed to this country at this time.⁹⁰

The Premier's letter came at a less opportune time when the Church's missionary focus had already shifted from the

⁸⁹See "Bond without Blood," ch. 4.

⁹⁰Norman Manley, Premier of Jamaica, to Patriarch Basilios: July 25, 1960, EOC 5811.

islands to North America. Understandably, the Patriarch chose to respond to Manley's request in a tone that was partly promising and partly noncommittal: "We are very much interested in this proposal, and the Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is at present considering the subject in all its aspects."⁹¹

The Jamaican branch was finally established in Kingston in 1970 by Aba Mandefro of New York in conjunction with the local chapter of the Ethiopian World Federation. Since there was no church building erected yet, the branch, known simply as the "Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica," was housed at the Ebenezer Methodist Church in Kingston.⁹²

When the EOC first arrived in TT in 1952, it roused a deep suspicion among the colonial officials and was received coldly. The colonial factor gone, the Jamaican officials' reaction to the coming of the Church was exactly the opposite. Unlike the traversals that Abera and Meshesha put up decades earlier, Mandefro would receive the most cordial cooperation:

We left New York May 14, 1970, at 11:00 A.M. and arrived in Jamaica at 3:00 p.M. the same day. With me were Deacon Petros Tomlin and Brother Gabre Hiwot Cameron. Hundreds of enthusiastic people waving Ethiopian flags and banners gathered at the Palisadoes Airport to welcome us. There was also a large sign of welcome prepared by the government

⁹¹Basilios to Manley: November 28, 1960, EOC 5811.

⁹²Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 208.

of Jamaica.⁹³

Prominent figures who turned out for the reception at the airport included Mr. Cecil Gordon and Mr. J. N. Hibbert of the EWF; Dr. Neville Galli-more, parliamentary secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs; Reverend John Swaby, Anglican bishop of Jamaica; Reverend John J. McEleney, then archbishop of the Roman Catholic church of Jamaica; and the opposition party leader, Michael Norman Manley, of whom more will be said below.⁹⁴

Having succeeded in his father's footsteps as a populist politician, Manley more than any other politician before him reached out to the substrata of the Jamaican society. As a biographer writes, "In contrast to the authoritarian response of the JLP to the rise of the black power movement, Manley openly courted black nationalists, Rastafarians, urban-youth, the unemployed, and the 'sufferers' throughout the island."⁹⁵

Manley and his associates counted on their connection with the EOC to draw the marginalized masses into the PNP rank-and-file to help them win the 1972 election. Manley therefore used the meeting with the Ethiopian cleric to

⁹³Ibid p. 204.

⁹⁴Ibid p. 205.

⁹⁵David Panton, Jamaica's Michael Manley: The Great Transformation (Kingston: Kingston Publishers, 1993), p. 33.

strengthen his pro-African image. In the guest's own words, "with M. Manley we discussed matters concerning African culture to be introduced to Jamaica, where, he suggested, Amharic and Arabic languages should be taught at the University of the West Indies."⁹⁶

In 1969 Manley had flown to Ethiopia in part to visit his brother Douglas, an employee with the United Nations, and in part to impress on his Africa-oriented constituents back home of his own pan-African commitment.⁹⁷ He returned from Ethiopia with what would soon become his priceless possession: a royal staff, a gift from the emperor. Christened the "Rod of Correction," the stick became Manley's inseparable companion and the Party's unique trademark in its campaign against corruption. Wherever the opposition leader went, the "Rod of Correction" followed. According to one writer, "The superstitious peasants and Rasta sufferahs turned out by the thousands to kneel and kiss the relic, tearfully thanking Michael as if he were Joshua reincarnated." The PNP, out of power since Norman Manley's 1962 defeat by JLP's strongman, Alexander Bustamante, had made a grand come back. "Manley was a virtual shoo-in due to his canny adoption of the Rod of Correction as a symbol of

⁹⁶Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 205.

⁹⁷Darrell Levi, Michael Manley: The Making of a Leader (London: Deutsch, 1989), p. 125.

the moral rearmament he supposedly wished to bring to Jamaican society."⁹⁸

In 1972 Manley ousted Bustamante's protege, Hughes Shearer, in a landslide victory at the polls. Inspired by Castro's egalitarian Cuba, where universal education and free health care guaranteed a higher living standard, Manley espoused a socialistic economic philosophy at home. Abroad, he pursued a less pro-U.S. and a more pro-Soviet foreign policy. His sympathy with African and Africa-oriented issues remained positive as before. He had been in office only for a few months when he received Fr. Mandefro as an official guest at the Jamaica House. "The following morning (May 19, 1972), we visited the Prime Minister at Jamaica House and discussed with him the establishment and development of Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica," the priest writes. "The probability of having the Amharic language and African culture taught at all levels in the various educational institutions throughout the island was also discussed."⁹⁹

Political considerations aside, the promotion of the EOC in Jamaica had social and religious implications. Because of its assumed credibility with the Rastafarians, civic and government officials anticipated a unique role for the Church as a reformatory institution. They hoped to use its influence

⁹⁸Timothy White, Catch a Fire p. 262.

⁹⁹Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church pp. 214-15.

as a positive deterrence against the under-class's supposed moral degeneration, its proclivity to crime, violence, drug, and other social evils. From Counsellor Eli Matalon, mayor of Kingston, up to the governor-general Sir Clifford Campbell, who volunteered to serve as the patron of the new Church, Ethiopian Christianity was hailed as an antidote to Rastafarianism. By exposing the inconsistencies between the Rastafarian dogma and the doctrines of Ethiopian Christianity, it was hoped the EOC would exert a dissuasive sway on the pro-Haile Selassie sect. Expectations were such that analogies were even drawn between the EOC and the Moravian Church, a denomination renowned for its pioneering missionary work among Jamaican slaves generations earlier.¹⁰⁰

The initial reaction of the Rastafarians to the EOC was far from enthusiastic, despite officials' expectation to the contrary. In the process of recruiting converts, Father Mandefro was often confronted by individuals who insisted to be baptized in no other name than in the name of Ras Tefari. "It was an extremely sorrowful and unforgettable moment for me at the registration meeting at Ebenezer Church, "especially when some Rastafarians angrily demanded to know, 'Who is Christ?'"¹⁰¹ The New York-based Archimandrite knew little about Rastafarians' belief and philosophy, but

¹⁰⁰Ibid p. 212.

¹⁰¹Ibid p. 208.

nonetheless found their sense of spiritual discontent and frustration too compelling to ignore. "Here were a people searching for their identity which was lost in Western civilization--a scattered and rejected people. I thought there must be some institutions from the motherland to which they can constantly reach out, to link themselves and to God."¹⁰²

Persistence and empathy gradually turn the tide in Mandefro's favor winning him thousands of converts across the island. "As was mentioned previously, a few of them were annoyed that the teachings of the Church were not in accordance with their own desires. Nevertheless, as I had come from Ethiopia I was welcomed to teach the right doctrine of Christ and thousands accepted the faith." By 1972, following the priest's seventh trip to Jamaica, there were about three thousand members of the new faith scattered in several branches, and the figure would grow steadily in conjunction with Abuna Theophilos's visit to the island a year later.¹⁰³

Theophilos and the 1973 Visit

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Theophilos was

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid p. 214 and 226.

one of the early visionaries who supported the globalization of the Ethiopian Church. His visits to the West in 1954 and 1959 were inspirational and resulted in the establishment of new church branches. Having succeeded as Ethiopia's second patriarch upon Basilios's death in 1970, Theophilos became the first head of the EOC ever to visit the West in response to an invitation by the National Council of American Churches.

Theophilos's May-June 1973 travels covered nine states in the U.S. and three nations in the Caribbean. Accompanying the Patriarch in his visits were high officials including Blatien Geta Mahateme-Selassie Wolde-Mesqel, Minister of Information; the Trinidad-based Meshesha, now Bishop Athanasius; Bishop Mekarios, and Gebre-Medhin Gebre-Yohnes, later Abuna Paulos.¹⁰⁴ Some of the trip's highlights in the U.S. included appearance at the Boston University where Theophilos was conferred an honorary doctor's degree, a breakfast invitation by U.S. law makers, as well as several meetings with influential African-American groups including with family members and associates of the late Martin Luther

¹⁰⁴Bishop Mekarios became Ethiopia's fourth patriarch after the death of Abuna Tekle-Haimanot in 1987. Gebre-Medhin was finishing a doctoral program in theology at Princeton when he joined Theophilos's entourage as its record keeper. In 1991 Gebre-Medhin, now Bishop Paulos, replaced Mekarios as the fifth patriarch. See Paulos, His Holiness Patriarch Theophilos p. 141.

King, Jr.¹⁰⁵

The main reason for the trip, besides attending the 25th anniversary of the founding of the WCC, was to raise funds for EOC's missionary projects overseas.¹⁰⁶ In this connection, the Patriarch spoke through an interpreter on one of the main problems of Christianity in Africa: its association with colonialism and wrongful portrait as the white man's religion. To make Christianity a self-reflective institution among peoples of color, he called for the promotion of the Ethiopian Church on the basis of its unique history and continental image. "Just as the capital city of Ethiopia has become the center of political activity in the continent, so could the Ethiopian Orthodox Church become the instrument of a new and revitalized evangelical thrust in Africa in cooperation with all sister Churches."¹⁰⁷

Theophilos's week-long travels through the West Indies became a watershed point surpassed only by Haile Selassie's historic trip seven years earlier. In Jamaica, he shared an outdoor mass with thousands of followers and donated one-thousand U.S. dollars for church building.¹⁰⁸ In Guyana, he promised the establishment of a Caribbean-wide center for the

¹⁰⁵Paulos, Theophilos pp. 164-65, 173 and 183.

¹⁰⁶Ibid p. 139, 150 and 160.

¹⁰⁷Ibid p. 150.

¹⁰⁸Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 217.

teaching of the Amharic language and for the training of the priesthood.¹⁰⁹ In Tobago, where the Patriarch was presented flowers by a 107-year-old member of the Church, Theophilos lectured on the history of the Ethiopian Church that reportedly left the audience in "tears."¹¹⁰

The Patriarchal visit to the West Indies remains remarkable for several reasons. First, it was preceded by a major development a year earlier: the anointment of Fr. Meshesha, Abuna Athanasius, as the bishop in charge of the Western diocese. Second, coming as it did only seven years after the historic appearance by the emperor, the Patriarch's visit was a powerful reminder of the growing spiritual bonds between Ethiopia and a segment of the Caribbean populace. Third, Theophilos's historic visit marked the coming of age of the Ethiopian Church in the New World. It elevated EOC's ecumenical standing in the Caribbean Council of Churches and, in so doing, revived anew its missionary fervor.

In the missionary spree that followed, new branches would spring up in the smaller Caribbean islands of St. Thomas, Bermuda and St. Kitts, as well as in the major cities such as London, Los Angeles and Toronto where there had been a viable West Indian presence. If the African Church ever claimed something akin to a golden age in the history of its

¹⁰⁹Paulos, Theophilos pp. 188-89.

¹¹⁰Ibid pp. 193-94.

overseas mission, it was in the first half of the seventies. The EOC had thenceforth become a truly hemispheric phenomenon, its presence extending from Toronto in the north to Guyana in the south.¹¹¹

The 1974 Revolution and Its Aftermath

In a dramatic turn of events that followed months of political unrest and a ravishing spell of famine that left tens of thousands dead, Haile Selassie was dethroned by a group of military officers, the Derg, on September 14, 1974. The King of Kings, almost senile due to old age, was shoved into the back seat of an old car, and driven off to an army barrack where he remained under strict custody until his death almost a year later. Gone was the monarchy and its role as "defender of the Faith," and with it the age-old intimate alliance between church and state.

The new government did not stop at that. In order to destroy any remaining vestige of the imperial past, all former ministers and top officials were imprisoned or executed. Patriarch Theophilos was among the many Ethiopians killed in prison, although his death was never made public. The Patriarch's arrest and subsequent disappearance had

¹¹¹Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church pp. 194-96, pp. 230-31 and pp. 233-34.

obvious disquieting effect on the clergy. Gebre-Igziabiher Degou who, only two years earlier had been consecrated as Bishop Samuel in charge of the southern archdiocese, was found dead in his Ziway headquarters, apparently an act of suicide, in the aftermath of the Prelate's arrest.¹¹²

First to fall victim to the Derg's anti-clerical policy was the EOC's overseas mission. Under the Marxist regime the Church had neither the political will nor the financial means to back its New World evangelism. Interactions were kept so minimal no high-ranking EOC official ever visited the West Indies for the entire years the Derg was in power. Mandefro and Meshesha were left to fend for themselves which made a power struggle between them inevitable, a consequence no less harmful than the political crisis thousands of miles away.

Since the late sixties, leadership competition had been apparent between Bronx and Arouka, where Mandefro and Meshesha were stationed respectively. In the seventies their rivalry took a more regional tone in the form of New York-Jamaica versus Trinidad-Guyana. Being where the EOC first took roots, Trinidad and Guyana had traditionally been

¹¹²Arrested on February 18, 1976, Theophilos was imprisoned in the palace basement with several other high-ranking officials. On July 14, 1979, Theophilos was taken to a secret location and strangled to death. Executed on the same day were Pastor Gudina Kumsa, head of the Mekane-Yesus Church in Ethiopia, and Ato Haile Fida, founder and leader of the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement. Paulos, Theophilos pp. 198-207.

avored over the other territories with the allocation of more priests. Through the late sixties Gebre-Yesus Meshesha and Fikre-Mariam Warqneh were stationed in the sister islands of Trinidad and Tobago, while Hadis Gidey remained active in the nearby Guyana. When Fikre-Mariam left for Ethiopia in the early seventies, in his place came two young priests, Wolde-Gabriel Wolde-Selassie and Hadis Gesese, to serve as Meshesha's assistants.

Jamaica, on the other hand, despite a larger population than TT and Guyana combined, was never assigned a permanently stationed Ethiopian priest. Mandefro had to use his personal connection to recruit a certain Deacon Tsegaye Wolde-Tekle and bring him to the island without the help of the Patriarchate. But Jamaica, for all its treatment as an underdog, had surpassed Trinidad as the major overseas mission center by the mid seventies with thousands of Ortho-Rastas having embraced the Ethiopian faith.¹¹³

The rift between New York-Jamaica and Trinidad-Guyana became more evident during the 1976 intra-denominational hemispheric conference. The meeting, hosted by Mandefro's New York parish, was attended by representatives of the various locations, except those from TT and Guyana, Meshesha's strongholds. A major resolution by the assembly, as expressed

¹¹³Tsegaye Wolde-Tekle, EOC Representative in Jamaica, to Patriarch Tekle-Haimanot: November 9, 1971 EC, EOC 1292.

in its letter to the Patriarchate, called for an independent North American diocese headed by none other than Fr. Mandefro. The letter did not mention Meshesha by name, but its partisanship in favor of Mandefro was evident of an ongoing power struggle between Trinidad and New York.¹¹⁴

Having finally relinquished his role as the head of the overseas mission, in 1979 the aging Meshesha retired to Ethiopia where he died four years later. The appointment of Mandefro as the next Archbishop, thenceforth Abuna Yesehaq,¹¹⁵ did not end the intra-regional competition. Tensions reached fever-pitch in the aftermath of the 1985 fund-raising campaign by the diocese for famine relief in Ethiopia. From Trinidad and Tobago alone, a sum of 88,000 U.S. dollars was raised and sent to Ethiopia through the Trinidadian-born Tekle-Mariam Greene, accompanied by the Toronto-based Qes Misale Engida. Hadis and Wolde-Gabriel, the resident priests in TT, had been away from home for more than a decade. The fact that they could not use this unique opportunity to visit their birthplace was seen as a sign of insensitivity on the part of Yesehaq. What was once a behind-the-scene rivalry between the Abuna and his assistants in TT had by 1989 ruptured into an ugly public scene involving the

¹¹⁴Mandefro to Patriarchate: September 7, 1976, EOC 1292.

¹¹⁵Patriarch Tekle-Haimanot to Yesehaq: February 7, 1971 EC, EOC 1292.

use of the media.

"Witchcraft and black magic surround allegations the two Ethiopian-born African priests have "hijacked" the TT branch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of the Western Hemisphere," a newspaper article stated, adding that "the Church's New York-based Archbishop Abuna Yesehaq has threatened to post them straight back to Ethiopia, Africa, or transfer them elsewhere if they don't behave and stop acting as 'gods'." Priests Wolde-Gabriel Wolde-Selassie of Arouka and Haddis Gessese of Tobago had surrounded themselves with "gangs of Rastafarians" and had also refused to "carry out church directives for the last two years," the report read. The paper further claimed that attempts were made on the life of the Archbishop by means of poisoning, "African style." "This is the first time in the history of the Church in TT that scandalous situation like this has arisen."¹¹⁶

To the detriment of many members, the crisis above represented an example of moral breakdown and a lack of leadership accountability. It was a testimony to the mother Church's increasing loss of influence and control over its Western diocese. It was also a precursor of what was to come in the nineties: an open factionalism pitting Yesehaq and his Jamaica-New York stronghold on the one hand, against the TT-Guyana alliance headed by Wolde-Gabriel, now Bishop Thadeus,

¹¹⁶"Rastas Hijack Church," Blast October 27, 1989.

on the other.

The 1991 overthrow of the Marxist junta by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front, an ethnic-based rebel force mostly from Tigray, added further complications to an already tense situation. The Derg, however anti-clerical and anti-religious, was cautious enough not to meddle directly in Church politics. EPRDF, on the other hand, had to restructure the Church leadership in order to bring it in line with its policy of Tigrean ethnic hegemony. As far as religious matters were concerned, the first measure taken by the new government was to replace the country's reigning patriarch Archbishop Mekarios, with a new patriarch of its choice, the Tigrean-born Archbishop Paulos. Since new patriarchs are appointed only with the death or retirement of the existing patriarch, the appointment of Paulos was condemned by many as usurpational.

In the case of Yesehaq, refusal to recognize the new leadership cost him his official post as a bishop. The Western Archdiocese was split into three dioceses so as to weaken Yesehaq's power base. Aba Wolde-Gabriel of Trinidad, Abuna Thadeus, was left in charge of the Caribbean and Latin American parishes, while Abuna Matheas and Abuna Yohannes officiated over the North American and West European divisions respectively. Holding defiantly to his title as the only lawful archbishop of the Western Hemisphere, Yesehaq

retained the loyalty of a large number of followers in New York, Jamaica, and of thousands of Ethiopian exiles. The Church in the West thus became divided against itself: one faction rallying behind Yesehaq and the deposed patriarch, the other faction supporting and supported by the Ethiopian government.

Continuity and Transformation

Although political events in Ethiopia had direct bearing on the progress of New World Orthodoxy, by the 1990s the Ethiopian Church in the West had grown complex enough to have its own internal dynamics. The Ethiopian Church has been in Trinidad and Tobago for fifty years and In jamaica for thirty years. The discussion about continuity and transformation, although still too premature to consider fully at this point, need some consideration here.

An impressive feature of Ethiopian Christianity in the Caribbean is in fact its literal transplantation, from the burning of incense at the altar to the creative adaptation of its various rituals and prayer chants by the Western-born clergy. Church articles including vestments, calendars, decorative artifacts and oil of anointment are brought from Ethiopia. Western-born clerics in general learn the mechanics of church service through on-the-job training as assistants

to the Ethiopian priest. Some of them, like Qes Tekle-Mariam Greene of Trinidad, have visited Ethiopia and gained firsthand knowledge of the country and its people. These factors, along with the historic visits to the Western Hemisphere by high-ranking church officials from Ethiopia, have served to reinforce continuity and adherence to traditional standards.¹¹⁷

There is one area where an obvious form of digression can be said to have taken place. In Ethiopia Ge'ez is still the ecclesiastical language by which most of the religious rites and ceremonies are performed. This is notwithstanding the fact that few Ethiopians outside the clergy speak or understand Ge'ez. In the Caribbean and in the Caribbean-centered branches in North America, English and Patois have replaced the ancient tongue as the church media. In the earlier decades, church rituals were conducted in Ge'Ez, but this has changed with the inclusion of several local-born priests and deacons into the church ranks. The irony to this is that West Indians now have a more verbatim understanding of the church rites and ceremonies than do their counterparts in Ethiopia for whom Ge'Ez is a new language.

The embrace of English and Patois as church media has not, however, ruled out the introduction of some Amharic and

¹¹⁷Misale Engida to Patriarchate: February 6 EC, EOC 1292. Also see Tekle-Mariam A. Green to Ministry of National Security (TT): January 30, 1978, EOC 1292.

Ge'Ez vocabulary. The faithful are taught the Lord's Prayer in Amharic, and are also familiar with words such as Amlak (God), Menfis Qidus (Holy Spirit), Aba (father), Temesgen (glory), as well as with greeting expressions such as Selam and Tena-Yistilgn. In addition, members take pride in knowing the meanings of their baptismal names, most of them derivations of compound words in Ge'ez.

As mentioned above, overseas Ethiopian church customs and rites have in themselves gone through few susceptible changes. Outside the church, however, Ethiopian religious icons have been adopted by popular culture both in their original as well as interpreted forms. Because of the intimate association between Ethiopia and the Sufferers, Rasta artistic expression has increasingly taken on Ethiopian religious and cultural symbols. Ethiopian church paraphernalia such as the priestly garb, the traditional cross in the shape of necklace, and the Makwamia or the prayer stick, are no less ubiquitous than the Amharic script and the green-gold-red tricolor that have regularly appeared on Reggae album covers.

The first Reggae group to incorporate Amharic lyrics into their music were the Abyssinians. Their 1969 single, "Setta Masgana le Amlak Hul Gize,"¹¹⁸ set a new trend in the

¹¹⁸The more correct version is "Sit Masgana le Amlak Hul Gize": praise the Lord everyday.

evolution of Reggae. It extended Reggae's syncretistic repertoire, one that many Jamaican artists have since found irresistible. Setta Masgana popularized the learning of Amharic catch words and phrases not just among the Reggae performers, but also among the Rasta rank and file in Trenchtown, some of whom organized Amharic classes using U.S. foreign language military manuals and tapes.¹¹⁹ The Abyssinians' innovative exemplar was taken a step further by the all-time Reggae star, Bob Marley, who put to music Haile Selassie's 1963 speech at the United Nations' general assembly. Marley incorporated the emperor's message, which was a denouncement of racism and colonialism, in his 1976 release, "war," and the song became an instant best seller among international peace activists.¹²⁰

Such has been the Rastafarians' interest in Ethiopian religious art, culture and history that they have become "leaders rather than followers in the recent renaissance of African styles and culture in Jamaica. The brethren were looking to Africa for inspiration when most Jamaicans knew no more about it than is shown in Tarzan films," writes Joseph Owens, one of the pioneering students of Rastafari. The

¹¹⁹Carol D. Yawney, "Rastafari Sounds of Cultural Resistance: Amharic Language Training in Trenchtown, Jamaica," in African-Caribbean Religions: 2nd International Conference of the Society for Caribbean Research, Vienna, 1990, Mansfred Kremser, ed. (Vienna: Wuv, 1994), pp. 33-48.

¹²⁰"War," Rastaman Vibration (Island Records, 1976).

Sufferers have, in this regard, become the forerunners of the black power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, which called for a closer unity between diasporan and continental Africans in search for economic justice and political independence. To meet the interest of their Africa-oriented constituents, Jamaican and Trinidadian prime ministers have visited the continent and established formal diplomatic contacts with some of the major African countries including Ethiopia. "The first "prize for the 1971 CARIFTA Queen beauty contest was nothing less than a trip to Ethiopia."¹²¹

On the negative side, incorporation of the Ethiopian church culture into Reggae music and Rasta art has made it difficult for the EOC to present itself as a mainstream branch of Christianity. In the case of Jamaica, the African mission had been welcomed to help reach out to the anti-establishment elements of society. Many Jamaicans now see the Church as having succumbed to Rastafarian influences. The absence of a stringent policy of membership on the part of the EOC, plus the fact that its Rasta converts continued to wear locks, have led the Jamaican middle class to think of the Church as a Rasta Church and of Abuna Yesehaq as a "rasta bishop."

The misperception has been further perpetuated by the media's portrait of the Tewahedo faith as a pro-Haile

¹²¹Owens, Dread p. 223.

Selassie sect. In Rasta and Resistance, for instance, campbell notes that the "Jamaican state encouraged this deification of Haile Selassie to the point where, for the first time in the history of the society, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was recognized as an authentic religious institution along with the Anglican and Roman Catholic institutions."¹²² Timothy White also states that the Rastafarians' belief in Haile Selassie's divinity was shared by "the Ethiopian peasantry and their equally credulous leaders." According to White, "many of the heroic tales and supernatural abilities that surrounded Haile Selassie were reportedly concocted by the emperor himself and duly circulated by the central government and the Coptic priesthood."¹²³

An even more compelling explanation for the popular yet fallacious association between Rastafari and the EOC comes from Time will Tell, Bob Marley's biographical video. In this otherwise healthy documentary film, a group of Ethiopian priests led by Abuna Yesehaq are shown presiding over the funeral rites for the deceased Reggae star. What the video leaves out, and therefore most Reggae fans do not know, is Marley's conversion to Ethiopian Christianity several months prior to his death. On November 4, 1980, the internationally-

¹²²Campbell, Rasta and Resistance p. 127.

¹²³White, Catch a Fire p. XV.

acclaimed Reggae king, then wasting away from a terminal cancer, was baptized as Berhane-Selassie, (light of the Trinity), by Abuna Yesehaq at a New York Hotel. His conversion was not made public for fear of denunciation by the hard-core Rasta community, for whom Marley had been nothing less than a prophetic figure.¹²⁴

The Church in the Nineties: Setbacks and Challenges

From the above discussion, two ongoing trends can be identified. First, because of the Rastafarian artistic factor, Northeast African crossovers have become more conspicuous in West Indian popular culture. Second, in the strictly religious sense, the EOC has maintained a peripheral presence among West Indian Christians, in part because of the Patriarchate's failure to pay adequate attention to the overseas branches, and in part because of the sect's close association with a counter culture, or Rastafari. In other words, although the EOC maintains a visible presence in the various Caribbean isles, its spiritual appeal to the mainstream has gradually declined.

In Millett's estimation, in TT church membership had fallen to about five thousand in the early nineties from an

¹²⁴Steven Davis, Bob Marley (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 240.

all-time high of about fourteen thousand in the mid sixties. These figures, however arbitrary, indicate an ongoing downhill trend. Given the quick expansion of the EOC in TT in the fifties, or in Jamaica in the seventies, there are obvious questions to ask regarding the current status of the Church. Why did the Church lose its early missionary momentum? What factors contributed to its decline?

As discussed earlier, the first initiative for the establishment of the EOC in the New World came from the West Indian themselves. On the Ethiopian side, the reasons for the missionary impulse were initially more political than religious. As such, the resource set aside for the purpose was little more than a token. The number of Ethiopian priests serving in the entire Western Hemisphere, for example, never amounted more than a handful at any time. Recruits lacked formal missionary training and, in some cases, spoke limited English. The EOC never developed an aggressive door-to-door outreach culture, a practice all too common in the Western churches. However well versed in traditional learning, the Ethiopian evangelists found themselves poorly prepared for the dynamic social lifestyle that their job in the New World demanded.

The lack of an aggressive missionary culture was further compounded by inadequate material resource. Long-term success of the missionary work demanded a solid and steady

financial commitment that was beyond the means of the Church or of the Ethiopian government. The 1947 (EC) total expenditure for the infant Church in the West was a mediocre sum of 11100 birr, of which 9600 birr went to pay Degou's and Meshesha's monthly salaries of 400 birr each.¹²⁵ Later on salaries were raised to 600 birr for the priests and 1000 birr for the bishop, which still constituted a meagerly income by Western living standards.¹²⁶

While West Indians held an optimistic, almost naive expectation, Ethiopian officials on the other hand regarded the islands as too remote and too insignificant. Other than facilitating the Church's presence in the region, the Ethiopian government did little to promote diplomatic or secular ties. The opening of an Ethiopian consulate in the English-speaking Caribbean would have been the next logical step following the establishment of the Ethiopian Church there. Such a step would have laid down the groundwork for cultural exchange programs by which secular traditions could have been promoted back and forth.

This never happened, however. The only Caribbean state with which Ethiopia maintained reciprocal diplomatic ties was

¹²⁵Aba Hanna Jimma, Royal Treasurer, to Ministry of Pen: September 16, 1948 EC, EOC 2687.

¹²⁶Ermias Kebede, Church Treasurer, "Memorandum Regarding Salary Payments to EOC Priests in the West," June 30, 1967 EC, EOC 1292. Ermias Kebede, "Memorandum Regarding Salary Payment to Bishop Athanasius," March 13, 1964 EC, EOC 2546.

Haiti, even though the governments of Trinidad and Jamaica had embassies established in Addis Ababa. Because of that, transactions between the EOC headquarters in Addis Ababa and its Caribbean stations were often conducted circuitously through the Ethiopian embassy in the U.S.. In one instance, a sum of 25,000 Birr, earmarked for the payments of land purchase in Tobago and Guyana, wound up in the personal bank account of Berhanu Dinke, the Ethiopian ambassador to Washington. Dinke later resigned his diplomatic post and sought a political asylum in the United States.¹²⁷

By the mid 1970s famine, war and human rights abuse had become the distinct trademarks of the Ethiopian government abroad. So shattered was Ethiopia's overseas image that association with the country no longer meant an asset for politicians such as Michael Manley. For the Marxist cadres in "Socialist" Ethiopia, ideological camaraderie, as seen in their country's more than congenial foreign policy toward Eastern Europe and Cuba, overrode their country's age-long passion for pan-African solidarity. Religion was condemned as opiate of the masses and, in cases of imported creeds such as the Protestant Church, tolerance gave in to persecution. Although prudence prevented the Derg from directly interfering in the running of the EOC, the most powerful

¹²⁷Solomon Gebre-Mariam, Director of Ministry of Pen, to Fit. Haile-Mikael Zewde, Vice Minister of Government Treasury, July 16, 1957 EC, EOC 1292.

institution in the land, it nonetheless pursued a very explicit anti-clerical attitude.

Deprived of government support that the EOC had traditionally enjoyed, the Patriarchate in Addis Ababa neither had the means nor the commitment to missionary work abroad. The late seventies and eighties moreover saw a shift in the EOC's overseas policy. With the influx of tens of thousands of Ethiopian refugees into North America, the primary reason for the Church's presence in the West was now the need to cater for the sizable Ethiopian community there. This marked a radical departure from the missionary *raison d'etre* of the earlier decades.

For the entire period that the Derg was in power, the Caribbean mission remained under a state of neglect as no major Church or government official visited the islands. Other than sending salaries and occasional words of encouragement, the authorities in Addis Ababa no longer maintained effective control over the Western diocese. Absence of direct supervision by the parental Church in Ethiopia resulted in serious leadership and personal rivalries. By 1989, mistrusts and suspicions among the clergy had degenerated into a free-for-all, putting the entire moral integrity of the Church in question. The situation was made further worse by the hoisting to power of an ethnocratic government in 1991. The fusion of ethnic politics into

religion by the new government had a far-reaching impact. The faithful in the West were divided into two camps: those in favor of the new government and its religious policy and those opposed to it.

The 1995 travels to the Caribbean by Abuna Paulos, the first patriarchal visit since Theophilos's trip 23 years earlier, neither mended the chasm nor healed the wound. In the aftermath of his visit, the Patriarch tried to revive the Caribbean mission by sending abroad a hand-picked group of six evangelists. If all had gone as planned, the group would have been responsible for the establishment of a seminary in Barbados where Western-born volunteers would train as EOC missionaries. The seminary project, the most ambitious effort since the sending of the fact-finding team to Trinidad in 1952, ended in great farce when the entire six defected to the U.S. en route to Barbados.¹²⁸

Despite such attempts to recreate the missionary heyday of the fifties, the Church continues to suffer a steady loss of membership and esteem. This author attended the January six Ethiopian Christmas celebration in Claxton Bay, Trinidad. The event, which included a night-long mass service and a candle light parade around the church building, was supposed

¹²⁸The six individuals were listed as Haile-Georgis Meressa, Tsige-Genet Kidane-Wold, Tesfa-Mariam Melaku, Wolde-Yesus Admase, Gebre-Dingel Abraha and Gebre-Hiwet Samuel, See Haile-Georgis Meressa, etc., to Archbishop Gerimma: Aug.6, 1988 EC, EOC 5811.

to be a major occasion attended by a large number of members coming from various parts of the island. The celebration, presided over by Archbishop Thadeus and his assistant local-born priests, attracted less than a hundred faithful. The author also visited the Holy Trinity Church in the nearby island of Tobago headed by an elderly Ethiopian priest, Aba Zenawi, successor to the deceased Hadis Gessese. The premise, once filled beyond capacity during Theophilos's 1973 visit, is now frequented by less than a score of regular members.

In Guyana, once an important missionary center, there has not been an Ethiopian priest since the departure of Mengiste Abebe, successor to Haddis Gidey, in the eighties, and the Church is now headed by a local-born acting priest Ralph Adams.¹²⁹ Barbados is where Prof. Zachariah Gibson, general secretary of the EOC in the Caribbean and Latin America, is headquartered. The six priests were to undergo a three-month language training in Barbados under the tutelage of Zachariah. Since their defection, no other persons have been sent in their place, an obvious sign of disparagement among the higher-ups in Addis Ababa.

Although the founding of the EOC in Bermuda goes back to 1975,¹³⁰ the pro-Ethiopian sect there remained only of a marginal interest for decades. This seems to have changed

¹²⁹Yesehaq, Ethiopian Tewahedo Church p. 200.

¹³⁰Ibid pp. 233-34.

following the visit to the island by Abuna Thadeus early in 1996.¹³¹ A newspaper report describing the Bishop's visit put the number of EOC followers in the island to about five hundred, a hundred or so of whom were active members. Haile-Tsion Edwin Simons, the first West Indian to study theology in a Seminary in Addis Ababa is a Bermudian national. According to earlier arrangement, four more West Indians were to join the seminary in Ethiopia in Simons' wake, but the plan has been called off following the six priests' defection.¹³²

As the founder of the EOC in Jamaica, where the Church still enjoys a wide popularity among the Ortho-Rastas, Yesehaq still commands respect and influence, although the question of succession still remains a contentious issue. Following the 1995 visit to the island by Paulos, the Jamaican Council of Churches, to which the EOC is an observer, ruled in favor of the new patriarch. On surface, the JCC's position seems to have ended the four-year-old dilemma, but "questions remain whether or not the Rastafarian members recognize the decision. "Did they welcome the verdict as an amicable solution in the spirit of ecumenism, or did

¹³¹"Ethiopian Orthodox Leader Pays a Visit," Bermuda Sun March 29, 1996.

¹³²"Ethiopian Church Enjoys Growth," Bermuda Sun June 23, 1996.

they regard it as Babylon's interference in Africa's religious concerns?"¹³³

in New York, Yesehaq's home parish, there has been likewise little West Indian sympathy for the current church leadership in Ethiopia. A major source of anger towards the Ethiopian authorities had been the court litigation over the ownership of the Holy Trinity Church in the Bronx. The church premise had been purchased in 1967 with the help of Yesehaq, then Aba Mandefro, through a government-guaranteed loan from the Ethiopian National Bank. Three decades later only a token portion of the loan had been paid. In August 1998 a New York court decreed that Yesehaq transfer the possession of the church building to representatives of the Ethiopian government. The court verdict came as a shock to the West Indian worshippers without whom the Church would not have existed in the first place. The resort to police power by Yesehaq's opponents to enforce the court's injunction succeeded in the further exacerbation of tensions; it especially raised the level of bitterness on the part of the West Indian protesters who bore the brunt of police beatings and arrest.¹³⁴

The 1998 incident and the ongoing church division

¹³³Murrell, Chanting Down Babylon pp. 174-75.

¹³⁴"Ethiopian Orthodox Church Under Siege," Ethiopian Register 5, 9 (September 1998), pp. 19-22.

render the fate of the Ortho-Rastas uncertain. In the immediate future West Indians may continue their association with the Church, given the close relationship they have fostered with Yesehaq over the past several decades. In the long-term, however, the survival of the Church in the Caribbean and in the Caribbean-centered communities in Europe and America hangs on several factors: the establishment of positive rapport between the West Indian faithful and the Ethiopian government; the diocese's ability to bring in new members, especially women and younger adults; the strengthening of the indigenization process of the mission by training more priests among the locals; the launching of intra-denominational fellowships between West Indian and Ethiopian worshippers; and the diffusion of regional rivalry through a more representative and competent leadership structure.

Conclusion

Ethiopia has invoked various and often contradictory representations in Western intellectual discourse. One prevalent theme in Ethiopian historiography since the 17th century has been the Semitic outpost thesis, the depiction of Ethiopian history as more Middle Eastern than African. The perception of Ethiopia as a country in but not of Africa has been shared by a generation of Ethiopianists, herein referred to as Semiticists.

On the positive side, the Semiticists pioneered a systematic study of Ethiopian cultures and languages, and in so doing popularized Ethiopian studies as a genuine field of learning in some of the well-known Western academic centers. On the negative side, in reaction to the Semiticists' portraits of Ethiopian history as a history of a superior immigrant race was born a deconstructionist-secessionist historiography. Secessionist historians not only read the Ethiopian past as a history of colonial expropriation but also formulated the intellectual and ideological justification of ethnic nationalism. Although the cultural bonds among Ethiopians have in the past withstood major national crises, including the five years of divide-and-rule under Italian occupation, the ongoing ethnic tensions in the

Horn are evident of the negative ramifications that Semiticist and secessionist historiographies have had on Northeast Africa.

Diametrically opposed to the European-centered Semiticist paradigm has been the Afrocentric treatment of Ethiopia as an indigenous African polity. The historiographic contention between the Africanist and the Europeanist perspectives lies in their contextualization of the early Axumite civilization. Whereas the European-centered interpretation attributes the rise of the Axumite epoch to colonial influence from South Arabia, the Afrocentric approach celebrates Axum as an autochthonous African state along with Egypt and Nubia.

In contrast to the European-centered world view, which still constitutes the core of Ethiopian historiography, the Africa-oriented interpretation of the Ethiopian past falls outside the realm of mainstream scholarship. Failure to locate Ethiopian history in a broader African context has, in turn, prevented students of Ethiopia from grappling with issues of greater continental and inter-continental concern. As a result of the marginalization of the African perspective, Ethiopian studies has become lopsided and inward oriented, and often the source for narrow ethnic nationalism.

What this study has therefore done is challenge conventional scholarship by presenting a coherent picture of

the pan-African ties between Ethiopia and diasporan blacks. The first physical encounter between Ethiopians and overseas blacks goes back to the turn of the century when a Haitian adventurer, inspired by Ethiopia's recent victory against Italy, arrived in Menelik's court. Although Sylvain's proposal for the establishment of diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and Haiti found little success, his visit to Northeast Africa opened a new era in trans-oceanic racial ties. Evident of this positive trend was the settlement in Northeast Africa in the early 1930s by scores of black immigrants in response to the Ethiopian government's invitation.

A landmark event in the history of modern pan-African nationalism was the 1935 Italo-Ethiopian war. Prior to the 1930s, the connection between Ethiopia and foreign blacks was mostly a sentimental one, centered on Ethiopia's mythic image. After the 1935 crisis, the concept of Ethiopianism took a more practical twist, given the flow of more information and increased mutual awareness.

Italy's unprovoked invasion of the ancient African state triggered a series of anti-colonialist demonstrations throughout the colored masses worldwide. In what came to be regarded as a racially driven European attack on the historic African kingdom, diasporan communities constituted an important pressure group in the effort to liberate Ethiopia.

Although they were denied the right to fight for the defense of their ancestral land by their respective governments, Caribbean and American blacks helped maintain the Ethiopian cause as one of the most pressing issues of the day through popular protests.

Ideologically, the Italo-Ethiopian war aroused various reactions among the black intellectuals of the United States and the West Indies. The war provided the black American left a historic opportunity to demonstrate its political sophistication and organizational skills. Hoping to create a united and class-conscious anti-fascist front, Harlem communists coordinated an interracial Ethiopian defense campaign. By bringing together various pro-Ethiopian groups, ranging from progressive whites to right wing Garveyite nationalists, they helped establish the United Aid for Ethiopia. Their success was short-lived, however. As it became gradually clear that the primary focus of the communists was the crises in Europe, there was a mass defection of blacks from the Party which put an end to its leadership role in the pro-Ethiopian mobilization.

While the wartime pro-Ethiopian mobilization left no lasting imprints on post-war Ethio-African-American relations, that same crisis was a critical point in the transformation of the West Indian intelligentsia from communism to black nationalism. Ethiopia's abandonment by the

major powers, especially by the Soviet Union, who had until then stood out as a champion of anti-colonialism, led many Caribbean intellectuals to look inward. Even notorious Marxist ideologues such as Padmore, who had earlier spoken against race awareness as a bourgeois concept, would now emerge as the leading advocates of pan-Africanism. In August 1935 a group of West Indian radicals together with some Africans in London formed the International African Friends of Abyssinia. Later reconstituted as the International African Service Bureau, the group sponsored the 1945 pan-African congress in Manchester, a watershed gathering that marked the turning point in the history of African nationalism.

The wartime mobilization also had lasting effects on Ethiopian national psyche. The Ethiopians, who hitherto took pride in their insulated national identity, began to see themselves in a global racial context in the aftermath of the fascist invasion. While Haile Selassie resorted to classic diplomacy to advance the cause of his beleaguered nation, his cousin Melaku Bayen exploited the racial card to rouse African-American moral and material support for his native land. Melaku's vision of the Ethiopian World Federation as a mass movement, reminiscent of the UNIA decades earlier, ended abruptly following his death in May 1940. His pan-African cause was partially picked up by the British-based Sylvia

Pankhurst, who, through her extensive publications, championed the need for closer unity between Ethiopia and the larger African world.

Melaku's and Sylvia's ideological foresights were beginning to manifest visibly on the Ethiopian national psyche by the 1950s. With the establishments of the UNECA and the OAU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia became a major center of continental politics, while the national university gained reputation as a hotbed of pan-African radicalism. Because of Haile Selassie's strong ties with the West, Ethiopian students saw the imperial government as a conservative, even reactionary, institution. Yet, when it came to African affairs, both the radicals and the monarchy made common cause in making sure that Ethiopia had the lion's share in the fight against colonial rule and apartheid. However opposite in their ideological visions, --Haile Selassie and the young intellectuals worked jointly to undermine Ethiopia's psychology of insularity. They passionately advocated for a greater participation in international politics, actively supported the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, and reaffirmed Ethiopia's racial ties with overseas blacks.

Whereas the post-war years marked the Africanization process of Ethiopian national consciousness, the same period on the other hand witnessed the dissipation of Ethiopian symbolism from African-American political thought. With the

independence of several African states in the early sixties, and with the rise of a more articulate group of African nationalist leaders, black Americans no longer felt duty-bound in their support for Ethiopia. Since the late fifties, moreover, most African-Americans had become more inward focused because of the civil rights movement, which enlarged the prospects of political inclusion at home. Even before Ethiopia's fall into cyclical famine and civil war in the mid seventies, mainstream black American literati had lost much of their interest in Africa, with a few exceptions such as South Africa where apartheid still made front-page news.

Only in the West Indies was the pro-Ethiopian sentiment kept alive beyond the immediate post-war decades. The Rastafarians' steadfast belief in Haile Selassie as the Messiah, and Ethiopia as the promised land, transformed the age-long concept of Ethiopianism into something akin to Zionism resulting in the repatriation of several Rastafarian groups. West Indian trickle to Ethiopia, which gained momentum in the late sixties after the allocation of settlement land in Shashemane, has been plagued by problems of factionalism, leadership rivalry and inadequate financial resources. These have in turn prevented the homestead community from becoming what its founders had envisioned it to be: a self-reliant, model community.

Since the land grant experiment has shown the

impracticality of wholesale migration, repatriation has been redefined to mean a spiritual sojourn to Africa as opposed to a physical one. The Rastafarian motto that "repatriation is a must and Babylon is foreign" is no longer taken literally. Shashemane is now as much a state of mind as it is a spot on the map. It symbolizes a spiritual and cultural sojourn to the past, a reconnectedness with one's ancient roots. This redefinition of repatriation as a process of psychological and spiritual transformation has in turn resulted in the decision by a growing number of Rastafarians to retrace their ancestral past not by settling in Africa, but by joining the Ethiopian Church and by learning its culture and language.

Caribbean religious interest in Ethiopia began in the late forties. Following the landing of two Ethiopian evangelists in Trinidad and Tobago in 1952 the Apostolic Church established branches in the various Caribbean isles, picking up thousands of converts in the process. Compared to the mid-seventies, when the EOC reached the heights of its popularity, by the early nineties the Church had lost much of its membership in part in response to Ethiopia's worsening image abroad and in part because of the Ethiopian government's growing indifference to the overseas mission. Nevertheless, the transplantation of the EOC in the Western Hemisphere stands out in its historic significance for two reasons. First, at a global level it symbolizes the ongoing

cultural dialogue between Africa and the New World more than a century after the lapse of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Second, at the national level it debunks the myth of Ethiopia as a disinterested bystander in New World black struggle to reconnect and identify with Africa.

In conclusion, this study has investigated Ethiopia's multi-faceted interactions with diasporan blacks. The work has identified four intertwined themes central to trans-oceanic racial discourse: pan-Africanism, migration, black nationalism, and the search for an African religious identity. Together, these themes indicate that, despite the absence of any physical contact between Northeast Africa and Western blacks prior to the 20th century, over the last several decades Ethiopians and West Indians have cultivated a more than casual socio-cultural bond.

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Note. EC stands for Ethiopian calendar, which is 7.5 years behind the Gregorian Calendar. Also, Ethiopian names appear in the entries below with first name first and last name second, as is the established tradition in Ethiopian studies.

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