

በላይኛው ጌታ በባልንጀራም  
 በቅዱስ ሚካኤል በጋሻ ጃግሬም  
 በጥላተ ሙሴ በነጭ አበዛም  
 ኅጃምን ይማሩት ፈረም አንልም

The English translation of the above couplets here given hereafter:

**In the name of the heavenly Lord your friend  
 In the name of Saint Michael your guardian angel  
 In the name of the Ark of Moses the giver of your white bread  
 Oh have mercy on Gojjam and we shall not call you coward <sup>105</sup>**

During the rampage by Yohannes’s army, women were raped, crops were destroyed, cattle and other domestic animals were looted and churches desecrated. The result was widespread famine in the otherwise self-sufficient Gojjam. A starving woman who allegedly killed her cat for meat and feared death from the animal’s flesh asked people who traveled through her village to tell the cause of her death as follows”

የምትሂዱ ሰዎች የምትሸጉሩ  
 ድመት በልታ ሞተች ብላችሁ ንገሩ  
 ዘንድሮ ንጉሱ ደህና ቢመሰሰት  
 ምንኛ ኅልድጪአል ኅጃሜ ምሳሰት

Yohannes’s policy of unification had also religious dimension as can be inferred from the following passages scribbled down by the Ethiopian historian Bahiru Zewde.

*“The Muslims of Wallo were told to renounce their faith and embrace Christianity or face confiscation of their land and property. The reactions were varied. The political leaders generally acquiesced. Thus, two prominent converts were Muhammad Ali, baptized into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as Mikael, and Abba Wataw, who became Hayla-Maryam. Others confirmed outwardly, praying to the Christian God in the daytime and to the Muslim Allah at night – thereby reinforcing the unique juxtaposition of Islam and Christianity that we find to this day in Wallo<sup>106</sup>.”*

የዮሐንስ በቅሎ ብረኪ ብረኪ  
 በመተማ በኩል መጣልሽ ማራኪ

*“The harsher aspects of Boru Meda in any case soon paled into insignificance in comparison with the intolerance, verging on fanaticism, that Yohannes showed towards Islam: it emerged that he was aiming not only at unity of doctrine, but also at unity of faith. There was no room for Islam in his ideological world. The thrust of his repression was directed against Wallo<sup>107</sup>.”* The harsh treatment of Muslims in Wallo

<sup>105</sup> - Abdusamad H. Ahmed, Northeast Africa Studies, 1991

<sup>106</sup> - Bahru Zewdie – Modern History of Ethiopia

<sup>107</sup> - Bahru Zewdie – Modern History of Ethiopia

forced some of them to flee to other areas of Ethiopia. Those who fled to Gurageland and Arsi were instrumental in spreading Islam. After resisting Yohannes's forced conversion of Muslims into the Christian faith, an Argobba Muslim leader by the name Sheik Talha fled to the Sudan with his followers. Later Talha and other Muslims from the districts of Azebo and Wolkait served as guides and foot soldiers to the Mahdists against Yohannes.

By the way what should we say about the atrocities committed against Ethiopian Muslims from Wello when they were forced by emperor Yohannes to renounce their religion and embrace Christianity on the pain of death? Why does Tecola or other Tigrean nationalists fail to mention the atrocities committed by Yohannes in the name of national unity whereas they are so vocal in cataloguing the alleged crimes of emperor Menelik who in fact had a liberal religious policy? Was it not on the order of emperor Yohannes that Ethiopian Moslems were beheaded? The following couplet encapsulates the pain of the Welloyes who were forced to convert their religion under duress. During one of the forced conversions to Christianity at a place called Kerka, a Wallo Muslim posed the following question to emperor Yohannes by the coining the following couplet which encapsulate the sense of loss and anguish felt by the Wello Moslems who were forced to change their religion on the pain of death.

ታናሽ ታላቅ በላን ከርቃ አደባባይ  
 ቋንቋዬ አለ ልብ ይጣፍጣል ወይ?

**Tanash talak bellan Kerka Adeebabay  
 Kiristian hoy al leb siga yitafetal wey ?**

Translations of the Amharic couplet coined by the people of Wello (who were adherents of Islam) and were forced to change their religion into Christianity on the order of emperor Yohannes :

**We have eaten the best of the oxen meat at Kerka square  
 Oh Christians is flesh tasty whereas the heart is missing<sup>108</sup>?**

We are not writing about the facts cited above with a view to demonize Yohannes who, in his view, was strengthening Ethiopian unity by promoting Ethiopian nationalism based on the Orthodox Christian faith at that time. Yohannes, unlike those of us who live today and reflect on his records deeds with a different lens and the benefit of hindsight, could not have appreciated the pain he was inflicting on Ethiopian Moslems. Equally, we cannot today endlessly condemn Menelik or Tewodros or their predecessors for things they have done more than 100 years ago. Unlike those of us who live in a modern era blessed with the virtues of knowledge, all our past rulers did not have the opportunity of benefiting from the progressives insight and knowledge we have at our disposal today. What we those of us in this generation can and should do is to learn from the mistakes of our past rulers and avoid the repetition of past mistakes so that our generation and posterity may be spared the scourge of hatred and the ravages of wars. Mutual

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<sup>108</sup> - Desta Tekle Weld – Addis Ye Amarigna Mezgebe Kalaat, pp 126

recriminations would not bring us anywhere nor help us in cultivating a sense of harmony that we need to forge unity and build a new future for our people who are at the bottom end of the world in terms of human development.

### **ARE WOYANNES VISIONARIES?**

Tecola Hagos, like all other Tigrean ethnicists, believes it required visionaries like the Woyannes for bringing fundamental changes in Ethiopia. I tend to agree with him on one aspect. To the extent Woaynnes have resuscitated fascist Italy's divide and rule policy, they are visionaries for spreading hate and divisiveness. The problem is that their vision is not original. It is a borrowed vision from the days of Mussolini and his fascist regime. Deeply ingrained in the psyche of "the hate Menelik" campaigners, is their love for Mussolini and their cherished hope that Meles would succeed in crystallizing the ethnic division of Ethiopian as the only means of guaranteeing the exclusive empowerment of the Tigrean ethnic group. A mere comparison between the socio-economic development of Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia during the last 13 years abundantly corroborates this fact.

The very essence of democracy is at loggerheads with the so-called "ethnic democracy" the stock-in-trade of the Tigrean regime that has been promoted by the TPLF during the last 13 years. Ethnic democracy which promotes group right (ethnic right) over individual right calls for a system of government whereby ethnic elites assume power on behalf of the imagined ethnic group they claim to represent. The very idea of the supremacy of individual right which forms the basis of any genuine democratic system is anathema to the entrepreneurs of ethnic nationalism such as the TPLF, OLF, ONC, Southern Coalition, TAND, etc who clamor for a political system which is based on group right (self-determination of a particular ethnic group) as opposed to individual right (a system of government where the individual determines his individual destiny freely and without being dictated by the whims of ethnic warlords or elites). The so-called "ethnic democracy" only succeeds in fragmenting a nation and encouraging different ethnic groups in a country to make exclusivist claims to a territory housing various ethnic groups and which otherwise belongs to all Ethiopians. The recent ethnic cleansing that took place in the Gambella area is one such consequence of the "ethnic democracy and ethnic federalism" which TPLF has been promoting in Ethiopia during the last 13 years. What transpired in Hararghe (Benedo), Arsi (Arba Gugu), Sidamo (Guji versus Gedeo), Ogaden (Somai versus Oromos), Shewa (Afars versus Oromos), etc, Gojjam (Gumuz versus Amharas), etc eloquently corroborates the destructive and divisive aspect of ethnic politics. Which ethnic group benefited from the mayhem, destruction and instability by the divisive policy TPLF has promoted in the name of ethnic democracy and which ethnic groups became victims of this destructive ethnicization policy is a question which all of us have to pose and find answer for. The majority of Ethiopians, who have to bear the brunt of the pain caused by TPLF's ethnic policy, can give an answer to this question.

While seemingly a new method to resolve the so called "nationalities question", its origin has deeper roots in the colonial policies of Italy. To call the proponents of this backward divide and rule politics visionaries is nothing but closing one's eyes to the tragic realities

which have been unfolding in Ethiopia before our own eyes. TPLF's vision in resuscitating Mussolini's fascist policy implies that there is a great confusion in our country. It is not ethnic and divisive politics that will solve the contradictions but popular-democratic struggles. What Ethiopians inside and outside the country demand for now is the general elections of 2005 must be free, fair and democratic. The election law that favors TPLF must make room for political parties with new ideas. Ethnic politics is dead on arrival.

### **“An Eternal Seeker of Truth” and The Hidden Truth**

In order to deceive critical observers, Tecola implies that his essays are intended to seek the truth, but there is one important truth that Tecola is hiding from the public. At the beginning of his verbal assault on Amharas and Menelik, Tecola received and published letters to the editor on his website. Most of the letters he received were from people who shared his hatred of the Amhara and congratulated him for standing up against the enemies of Tigrayans (read Amharas). One of the letters reads:

*“You are a kin person we (Tigrean) are lacking at this moment, telling them like it is. We are being pushed aside by this Neftegnas who will never see a good thing of us, no matter how we bend backwards. They have spread their poison since 100 years ago which is haunting us to this day.”*

The above paragraph is taken from a letter of support sent to Tecola for his effort that went into dehumanizing and pillorying Amharas and Menelik as the cancers in the body politics of Ethiopia. The writer signed his name as “Yoseph Giday.”

While letters of gratitude are kept on Tecola's website where readers have easy access to see the support he receives from his admirers (ethnicists), letters which are very critical of his anti-Amhara campaign are posted in a section of Tecola's webpage where a casual observer cannot see them. Mindful of the damage the critical letters can do to his image, Tecola keeps the critical letters in section dubbed as “Book Review” hidden from public view. For the record here is one of critical letters NOT found in “Letter to The Editor” section of the website.

**Dear Dr. Tecola,**

**“I initially wanted to post this brief message on Ethioforum (where an excerpt of your book review was posted), but I finally abandon the idea and decided to send the message to you. I am not a Shoa Amhara, not even an Amhara by ethnicity. Nor do I support Meles or EPLF. I have opposed all the three regimes that have ruled (misruled) Ethiopia during my lifetime. Obviously, I should belong to the group of Ethiopians who you consider genuine compatriots. However, I was honestly dismayed by both the content and tenor of your book review. I had had high regard for you for quite some time because I consider you a courageous Ethiopian, and your love for your country is inspiring. You also are a very smart man with a sharp intellect. Your potential to contribute to your bleeding country's**

salvation is enormous. There are very few Ethiopians who have been blessed with the good fortune to amass so much knowledge or to nurture passion and commitment to causes larger than themselves.

But I am beginning to harbor serious doubt whether Ethiopia will ever be fortunate enough to see the potential of yours translated into reality. I used to regret that a person like you had wasted so much of his life with a petty obsession with ethnicity. I was hopping that after you left Meles' government, you would gradually escape your ethnicist entrapment. However it seems to me that both your mental frame and structure of feeling is seriously damaged by parochial ethnicist outlooks. Your ability to perceive social processes in any meaningful depth and to formulate visions that are grounded in humanistic values is seriously constrained by the primary frame of reference from which you seem to draw your ethics and politics, namely ethnicity. You often sound like a sect leader who must make all events of the universe fit into narrow religious scheme of interpretation and judgment.

Just read your book review again – it is morbid. The single organizing notion of your narrative of Ethiopian evens going all the way to Menelik is an anti-Amhara and pro-Tigrean bias. You even go to the extent of claiming that the reason why people in DC were hostile to Ambassador Berhane was because they didn't want to see a Tigrean in a position of power/honor (as if you don't know who one of Ethiopia's powerful Foreign Minister was long before TPLF came to power!). And you really want us to hold Shoan Amharas (that is how you label the people whom TPLF brought together to fake Amhara ethnic representation) responsible for Meles' victory over the Dissenters today? The only people who end up being the bright lights of your narrative are Tigreans at home and abroad (save Meles Zenawi), Negasso Gidada, and of course you. Really, you live in a very small cognitive and emotional universe.

I think this is sick. It diminishes you as a person, let alone as a public intellectual and political leader who aspires to elevate a people. I hope you realize some day that purging yourself of the dehumanizing and deforming grips of ethnicism would be a truly liberating experience to you both as an Ethiopian and as a thinker. Only when we cease to overvalue ethnicity and develop social perspectives that go beyond ethnicity can we, as intellectuals and civic leaders, help take our Ethiopian compatriots to the heights of their humanity – a place where their goodness can be nurtured, and whether their human weaknesses can be mitigated or at least less exploited by fanatic tyrants and rank political crooks. Forgive me for the harsh words – I simply was disgusted by the ethnicist excesses of your book review. I honestly hope that you will escape the entrapment that has victimized so many, you simply are too good for that.”

Signed:

Best, Afework.

The letter is a crucial for two reasons. First, the writer knows Tecola's past obsession with ethnicity, and second it validates my argument that what Tecolas disguises as "Mahal-Safari" is a cover up for his hatred of Shoan Amhara. If there is any doubt in people's mind, Afework's letter clearly demonstrates Tecola's reason for dwelling on Ethiopian leaders he identifies with Amharas is NOT to seek the truth but to manifest his deeply held views that Amharas are impediment to Tigrayan progress and should be dealt with. I am obliged to ask: if Shoan Amharas are such monsters how is it possible for Tigregna speakers living in Shoa to prosper and attain a high standard of living than Shoans?

### **Dishes Out But Cannot Take It Back**

When cornered with his insensitive and ethnocentric argument Tecola resorts to vulgarity and uses street language to deflect his critics. He has no problem hurling insult against his critics but not equipped to take back when reciprocated. He believes he is a person deserving respect and adulation for his dubious academic credential while he does not reciprocate respect to our leaders and his critics. Respect is earned by the manner one displays in his private and public life but not demanded while insulting others. He insults the humanity of Menelik as "no ordinary criminal, the wrong symbol, common treasonous, divisive, immoral, and corrupt leader who remains to this day the very cause of our present economic and political problems. In the same vein the high priest of morality contradicts himself and writes, "Hate is an emotional degenerating handicap; I have no such deformity." When I read Tecola's contradictions I am reminded of what Malcom X once said. Malcom X who saw some of the American society as irredeemably racist, reminded the hatemongers, "You don't stick a knife in a man's back nine inches and then pull it out six inches and say you're making a progress." Tecola cannot lecture others about hate when in fact almost everything he writes is full of hate and a stab to the chest with a dagger.

In a private email to an Ethiopian colleague Tecola wrote slander and complained about Professor Getatchew Haile and myself. I sent email message to Professor Getatchew and asked him the reasons for Tecola's outburst and disrespectful behavior. Here is Professor Getatchew's response:

"Dear Girma,

You have asked me what occurred between me and Professor Tecola Hagos to provoke him to insult me as he has.

I am not sure; but let me begin at the beginning. It was I who first initiated contact with Mr. Tecola (I was not aware at that time that he had the academic title of professor), because I had read about his book "Democracy in Ethiopia?" and was curious to speak to him, just as I am curious to speak to all writers who write about Ethiopia. We had several long telephone conversations, and in all of those exchanges I found Professor Tecola engaging and polite. Nothing he ever said would lead me to think him capable of using

the vulgar street language attributed to him. Indeed, are you sure the words are his? Anything is possible with the Internet.

In fact, the only thing that I ever found unusual in our exchanges was a strange letter he once wrote me. In that letter, he all of a sudden asked me to stop writing on the political situation in Ethiopia. I could not figure out who he thought I was hurting. In any event, he changed his mind when I asked him why I should not write about my country when others, including him, continue to do so.

Our exchanges were warm and productive enough that Professor Tecola proposed that I meet him and others in Washington, D.C. to discuss some important matters. I could not make the trip from Minneapolis to Washington on the date he proposed, but rather than turn down the invitation I informed him that I would be in Washington at another time on other business and proposed that we meet then. As his other colleagues could not make my date, Professor Tecola and I agreed that he and I would meet so that he could brief me on his discussions with the others. I made arrangements to come to Washington one day earlier than I needed to for my other business and informed Professor Tecola of the date and time of my arrival and the name of the hotel where I would be staying. We agreed that we should call each other as soon as I arrived.

The gentleman never showed up, nor called. I called him several times, only to meet an answering machine on which I left at least two messages. When everything was silent, I remembered Emperor Haile Sellassie's words, "Silence is also a form of response—"*zimmitamm mels new*."

After all this rude and un-Ethiopian behavior, I received from Professor Tecola, several months later, an e-mail inviting me to write for his website, without any reference to, much less apology for, what occurred in Washington. As you know, there are many, many websites. I am honored when I am invited to contribute to these venues, but I cannot possibly respond to every invitation I receive. Moreover, in this particular case I was not persuaded that a new website was necessary as opposed to enhancing an existing site such as the Deqi Alula website (to which, incidentally, Professor Tecola had also invited me to contribute).

So did I respond to Professor Tecola's invitation? To use His Excellency's adage again, "Silence is also a form of response—"*zimmitam mels new*". As is my right, that was the response I chose.

Selam

Getatchew Haile “

As any keen observer can see from Professor Getatchew's response that the main reason why Tecola approached the Professor was to convince him to stop writing about TPLF (Tecola's darling organization) and expose its divisive and destructive politics. Tecola, no doubt, felt that the Professor's argument against TPLF had inflicted a deep wound in

his psyche and wanted him to stop writing about TPLF. By all accounts of his public pronouncements, Tecola is “Their Man Amongst Us” posturing as a great patriot while espousing TPLF and its ethnic agenda.

### **“The Final Solution” to the Amhara problem as suggested by Tecola Hagos**

As I was finishing this article I watched a TV documentary about the extermination of Jews in Auschwitz and other Nazi camps. One of the S.S. guards was asked if the killing that took place in the camp was justified. His response was, “Based on the propaganda we read, we all believed all Jews were criminals.” The propaganda against the Jews was Hitler’s assertion that there were International conspiracy by the Jews against Germany and that the defeat of Germany in the First World War was due to Jews. In Rwanda the Tutsi were considered as snakes and cockroaches to be exterminated.

A careful examination of EPLF, TPLF, OLF campaigns, mayhem and the writings of ethnonationalist such as Tecola and others are clear reminders of the prelude to the extermination of Jews in Germany and Tutsis in Rwanda. There is a similar tone in Tecola’s discourses. Just like the Jews were assumed conspirators against the German people, there is a belief that Amharas, especially Shoan-Amharas, are conspiring against the Tigrian regime. Tecola’s writings are clear examples of Shewan-Amhara conspiracy theory. One cannot help but draw a parallel between Nazi propaganda against Jews and the anti-Amhara campaign by ethnonationalists. What should be done to solve the problem – i.e. Amhara? Tecola gives a hint on how to solve that problem. His prescription reads:

**“These (Mahal Sefaris) are a group of individuals easily identifiable coming mostly from one small area in central Ethiopia along with opportunists from other parts of Ethiopia. They are our greatest obstacles to us all from achieving political and economic advancement. They have set us back from being united, productive, and socially responsible citizens for at least a century since the time of Menilik II. They are the cancerous growth in our polis. We must entertain the possibility of moving ahead with our destiny without the mehal safaris. We can excise them from power, or bottle them up in their own area of kingdom and see to it that they do not any more use us to promote their hold on economic and political power in Ethiopia. Our decision must take into account how we can achieve the greatest good<sup>109</sup>”.**

Tecola Hagos, “PARADIGM OF POVERTY AND HUMANISM: UNDOING ETHIOPIA’S MODERNITY”, July 24, 2003 Washington DC USA.

As readers can judge from the foregoing, Nazi and Hutu extremists could not have used a better propaganda tool than this to eliminate what they considered their enemies. Some

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<sup>109</sup> - Tecola Hagos, “PARADIGM OF POVERTY AND HUMANISM: UNDOING ETHIOPIA’S MODERNITY”, July 24, 2003 Washington DC USA.



people may dismiss Tecola's ideas as mere rhetoric and nuisance that should be ignored. I submit that the writer is expressing a deeply held belief in his heart that Amharas are the enemies of Tigrayans and should be dealt with while TPLF is in power, an opportune moment to implement "The Final Solution." This is a sadistic prophecy that Amhara Ethiopians should not ignore. It is also a clear reminder of the Armenian experience in the hands of the Turks.

Armenian political parties had struggled long for a new social order based on equality between the various ethnic groups as well as for political and economic justice. That vision contradicted the ideology of Turkish elite just like the vision of Ethiopian opposition contradicts the domination and exclusive ethnic ideology of Tigrayan elite. The solution to the social problem faced by the Turks was the indiscriminate massacre of millions of Armenians. Armenians became victims of a preconceived plan of annihilation. The annihilation involved several predetermined and consecutive steps. Armenians were disarmed, emasculated as a people. They were collectively demonized and their humanity, cultural symbols, leaders deconstructed. Having done that the Turkish soldiers drove them by whips and bayonets into the mountains where they finally murdered them en mass. Similar steps were taken in Ethiopia, especially in the so-called "Oromia Kilill" where Amharic speakers were rounded up and massacred in cold blood. Harsh measures were taken in Northern Shewa and Gondar, Gojjam as TPLF considers these places as hot-beds of opposition to his regime. All Ethiopians must face this truth.

From reading what Tecola writes about our leaders, the institutions they built, one can easily conclude that he is regurgitating what TPLF and its satellite ethnic political parties have been preaching about Amharas. It is also quite obvious he is consumed by fear of the alleged "Amhara enemy" that lurks in the corner. Tecola really suffers from suffers from "hate the other" syndrome. He believes that non-Tigrayans are threats to the TPLF regime that he ethnically identifies with. The need to use Amharas as scapegoat is therefore to rally other ethnic groups to support TPLF's mission of divide and conquer. Just as Hitler tried to fill the hearts of the anxiety-ridden Germans with a sense of superiority by painting the Jewish people as "vermin" and "pestilence", Tecola and his TPLF followers try to rally Tigregna speakers and non-Amharas behind them with an aim to render "The Final Solution" to the Amhara conveniently packaged as "Mehal Sefaris". He believes Tigrayans were kept in the dark due to "Amhara hegemony" hence, now is the time to take matters in their own hands to make sure that the Mehal Sefaris or Amharas would never come back to the Ethiopian political scene. If one has any doubt as to the anti-Amhara thrust of even those former TPLF leaders like Gebru Asrat and Co. who claim that they have reconstructed themselves and joined the mainstream Ethiopian politics, the following paragraph from the political program which they recently made public clearly corroborates their Anti-Amhara fixation and hatred. I quote the paragraph for the benefit of those who have not read their political program that has been made public at the end of December 2004.

Paragraph 3.3.4 of the political program which has been distributed by former TPLF leaders who claim that they are opposed to the incumbent government defines its goals as follows:

***“To fight against the efforts of the old and the new chauvinist forces who try to snatch away the victories and rights of nations and nationalities that have been won after great sacrifices <sup>110</sup>”.***

As the reader may infer from the above paragraph, chauvinist forces refers to Amharas and pan-Ethiopian political groups such as AEPUP, EDUP and the Rainbow Coalition which has recently made its debut on the Ethiopian political scene. Chauvinist is a code name for anything related to Amharas and it has been the practice of ethnonationalists to label as chauvinist all those groups who emphasize the supremacy of individual rights over group or ethnic rights.

There is an awesome amount of theme on which we Ethiopians can debate about our country's past, present and future. We all are our parents children and have with us all the individual and collective societal baggage that attends it. The tendency of ethnonationalists to ascribe the collective societal and structural problems of Ethiopia to one ethnic group is not only unfair and unjust but also polarizing and divisive. History is replete with individuals and governments that annihilated an entire group of people to legitimize their rule and to stay in power. No one argues that our leaders' internal policies were fair and perfect to various ethnic and interest groups. However, to paint Shoans in particular and Amharas in general as criminals has no factual basis than ethnic hatred. Self-hatred is at the root of race or ethnic hatred. What is disturbing most is when the sources of hate and inciting message are people who pride themselves as educated and liberated from village mentality. In order to hide their intended targets and hatred, they package their hate messages as “intellectual inquiry” and “seeker of truth” but in reality they falsify what is truth in a way nobody recognizes it. For all practical matters the predicament that Ethiopia finds itself today is because of Meles and TPLF but not the glorious history of Menelik and Amharas who are used as scapegoat by bigots and hate mongers.

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<sup>110</sup> - A draft political programme submitted for discussion to the Ethiopian democratic forces, December 2004.