

The Reappearance Derg's Villain as Book writer: Half story is spin!

By Ewnetu Sime |

A former military junta (better known as the Derg) official Prime Minister (PM) Fikre Selassie Wogderess wrote a book in Amharic entitled "Igna-ena Abyoitu" meaning: "Us (we) and The Revolution". The author wrote his version of story of Derg's history from the day it was formed to the end. During this period our beloved country plunged almost two decades of oppressive and repressive dictatorship. It seems obvious the seed of the problem has different basis but the main one is not only Mengistu's but the Derg itself desire to maintain a monopoly of state power by brutal force. Ethiopians were governed by absolute tyranny and terror. The arguments or information presented in the book blame EPRP for all the aspects of political, social and economic failures. While the regime that was in power never accept responsibility or had no regret for their actions. It contains full of excuses for all their failures. When you are reading the book you lose the purpose of writing a book if the book never tells you at least some of the known truths. This book failed to offer new lesson.

The author try to tell us in slow and deliberate process there is no despotic government during his period. The extreme ruthlessness of his government including random killing around every corner of the cities in late 70's committed murder is to defend a revolution. The story he composed does not shield him from fact that the country was lived for almost two decade under the horrors of the dictatorships rule, in which the author was part of it. He was one of the mindless herds in Derg without regard for human life except cheering Mengistu Haile Mariam throughout the book for his short term survival. As Mengistu's power grew the author was quietly working with him as others seemingly reasonable men are filtered out of the system, and PM Fikre Selassie has been promoted. We knew Fikre Selassie's superior Mengistu was a modern monster like Stalin or Pol Pot solely on the whims of himself that answers to no one. Under Mengistu's command, Derg always acted without conscience and had massacred a generation in his tyranny rule. He is nether willing to establish all inclusive democratic system, nor able to end the civil war. What he left was the destruction of economic infrastructure and followed by ethnic based ruthless regime. This book justifies brutality as a means for "saving revolution". Furthermore, due to number of human rights violations including, detentions, extra-judicial killings, summary executions, maladministration and wrong policy, Derg lost in battle field the peasant army. The country became vulnerable, poverty wide spread, ethnic division increased, all those bad events happened because of Derg misguided "saving the revolution" idea.

Below are comments limited to couple of author's stories, a) History of the farmers struggle, b) the revolt of the landowners in their own localities.

The History of the farmers struggle:

Interestingly the author started being a high priesthood of academia. On page 15 the author stated no peasants/ farmers movement existed prior the revolution. The Bale's province farmer movement was done by outside conspirators and the Gojjam farmer's movements were insignificant. He further stated that the resistance of the farmers were exaggerated and used by individual they call themselves progressive. One can observe he did not bother to research it, he prefers to undermine and demonize the farmers protest. It is well known fact in both provinces as Emperor imposed new tax reform in 1967. Small or large farmers, ordinary peasant farmers alike rebelled to the new tax reform. Due to these rebellion movements the Emperor was forced to halt the tax reform. Documented studies by

researches under Africa Studies Series publication (Ethiopia: Power and Protest, By Dr. G.Tareke) with great detail evidence readily available confirming that peasants resistance exist prior 1974 EC revolution. It is understandable that none of the peasant's movement was capable of changing the feudal system. This is due to the movements were isolated and they lack of organizational skill to be as insurgent force. However, it is widely believed that the peasant movements contribute as one of the factor to eruption of 1974 EC revolution.

The Revolt of the Landowners in their localities:

The author claims armed rebellious in several localities against Derg was raised due to the new land reform proclamations. This is not really quite true statement. The case of patriot Dejazmatch Kebede Bizunehs ' s, that mentioned on page 197, could be an example to illustrate that his revolt is not related to land reform proclamation. Derg never bother to sort out or give credit to Ethiopian patriotic those fought against Italian invasion. Post liberation from Italian occupation some of patriots lived in exile in their own country by the Emperor order due to opposition to his rule. They lived under constant threat by Emperor's security force. It is widely known that after seeing the atrocious deed of the Italians, Dejazmatch Kebede is one of the patriots fought the invasion to liberate Ethiopia. He has been recognized as war heroes since then. He was a religious person, and had no illusion as to the communist rule real intention and what mean to him and his fellow citizens. It is unreasonable to think when you are not allowed to practice religion, not allowed to have funeral to religious place, not having freedom of movement and other many others oppressive rules used under communist rules, it will trigger anger. Of course, Dejazmatch Kebede hadn't benefited from Emperor Rule or given a large amount of land for his role against Italian invasion, due to his opposition to the Emperor repressive rule. So, he was not one of the large landowner, as book described him. He might have small land, but he resisted against a communist rule. Derg ordered their soldiers armed with heavy weapons, believing would bring this patriotic man to his knees. As you may guess as patriotic lifestyle he never believed in surrender to his enemy. After fierce fight with Derg's soldiers he killed himself. Interestingly he was sheltered and protected more than five years by his poor farmers he lived in. Dejazmatch Kebede's greatness will live on in history book.

The author has an attempt to legitimize Derg dictatorial rule. The search of solutions to root of all internal political conflicts, social, economic breakdown etc. were not dealt with democracy principle. It was dealt by brutal force. They continued to rule through sheer terror. As result, a period of relative peace and stability become a dream for all Ethiopians. The civil war consumed too many lives until Mengistu disgracefully surrender the country to a toxic single ethnic-based TPLF rule, and fled to Zimbabwe with unspecified amount of Ethiopian people's money.

In very few areas of the book, the author's statements might possible fill a gap of Derg's history's. But for those who passed through Red Terror and went through unbearable pain deserve an honest story, not story of spin. The author was castrated for 20 years for his involvement of the Derg's crimes. A Prison term supposed to help the convicts to be rehabilitated and be truthful as they return to the society. Unfortunately, in my opinion his book has not reflected that. Fikre Selassie didn't feel morally responsible for unspeakable violence done to countless displaced or killed people under Derg's rule. The country they left behind is in much vulnerable state that they have received. At least at this aged stage he is expected to show some remorse. Ethiopia political scene since Derg overthrow the Emperor, has brought the country nothing but miseries, and provided a path for repression and violation of human rights by ethnic blinded zealot.