

# NES COMMENTARY On 117 Years Of Adwa Victory



Network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES)

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**Title: The Significance of Adwa Victory for Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance 50 years after the OAU**

## Inspiration

*“Those who have strength, support us with your strength  
Those who are weak, support us with your prayers” Aste Menelik*

*“ I am a woman. I do not like war. But I would rather die than accepting your deal.” Etigue Taitu Bitul*

*“They lost their history, so they died.” An African Maxim*

*“A country without historical memory is like a person without a head” The message from our ancestors*

*“If we appreciate the achievements of our ancestors and develop the capacity and openness to learn from their mistakes, we will always stand tall with dignity” NES*

## Introduction

We would like to thank you all those throughout the world who are making the effort to remember and celebrate the 117 years of the battle of Adwa, which is now increasingly becoming recognized as a definitive victory over world empire and colonialism.

It is said everything is moved but memory; we heartily welcome that this important day is being remembered in Ethiopia, by the Ethiopian heritage society in America, UK, Netherlands, South Africa and elsewhere. All efforts to recognize and remember 117 years of Adwa Victory must be appreciated, and all who took the initiative in preparing and organizing education to make sure the Adwa Victory every year without fail is celebrated must be welcome.

## 1. Background

All the varied groups from Oromia to Eritrea were mobilized and contributed richly to the success of the Adwa victory by all Ethiopians through the depth and breadth of the land. This was not a victory of the leaders, or one ethnic group. This was a national victory with a wider African and indeed world significance. It was and remains an exemplary episode in demonstrating what a united people can achieve.

Adwa was a major anti-colonialist battle fought by all Ethiopians, under the skilful leadership of Emperor Menelik and Empress Taitu. This victory resonated well beyond the Ethiopian and indeed the African border. It represented the clash between colonialism and liberation on a world-scale.

Every year during Yekatit, Adwa can provide the occasion to appreciate fully the international significance of the Ethiopian victory over the world colonial project in Africa. The failure to put this victory in the context of the wider challenge which confronted Africa before, during and after the nineteenth century needs to be put right.

It is a matter of historical record that the Adwa victory signaled the beginning of the end of the Scramble for Africa. This victory constitutes a crucial chapter in the record of African resistance and liberation. It armed generations of Africans with the confidence of victory to engage in resistance and liberation. It attracted attention as far as the Caribbean and the Americas, not to mention Europe and the rest of Africa.

It deserves to be celebrated both as a significant episode in its own right and as a memory serving well the emerging communities of resistances in the African world never again to surrender to colonial tyranny. The battle of Adwa is not just a memory of the past. It continues to live on in the eternal river of time.

This event which took place 117 years ago by a relatively small and weak country, against Italy, a formidable, highly armed and ambitious new colonial power supported by the major imperialist powers is still relevant today.

It is united and not divided Ethiopians that brought the victory to a full realization.

It is the strategic thinking of the leadership that made a big difference.

The Adwa Victory is a key pillar of the Pan- African Triple Helix

## 2. The Pan-African Triple Helix

Adwa Victory provided probably one of the best, if not the very best of all the best practical examples of the African resistance history during the Scramble for Africa. Hence it becomes one of the pivotal helices for Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism (e.g. the Adwa Victory). *Helix I* (1896).

The other helix is World Union of Ethiopians (Africans), formed as the African Association in 1897 from outside Africa. The pan-African congress that I classify as the *Helix II* (1900) was founded by Sylvester Williams who was in direct contact with Emperor Menelik at the time. Cuban-Americans, Hatians and African Diaspora from Brazil all were inspired by the Adwa Victory of 1896.

The third helix is the formation of the African National Congress in 1912 which celebrated its 100 years in 2012. This First Liberation Movement, ANC was formed with spiritualism and *Ethiopianism* acknowledged by former president Mandela as follows:

“Fundamental tenets of the Ethiopian Movement were self-worth, self-reliance and freedom. These tenets drew the advocates of Ethiopianism, like a magnet, to the growing political movement. That political movement was to culminate in the formation of the ANC in 1912. It is in this sense that the ANC, we, trace the seeds of the formation of our organization to the Ethiopian Movement of the 1890s” ( **Nelson Mandela, Speech to the Free Ethiopian Church of South Africa**)

African -American churchmen who went to South Africa in the 1890s arrived at a time when some African Christians were setting up churches of their own. This independent-church movement was called "Ethiopianism"

Ethiopianism became a generic term to describe a whole range of the black man's efforts to improve his religious, educational and political status in society.

It became the concept that constituted pan-Africanism from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20th century until World War I in 1914.

The Adwa victory provided practical expression to Ethiopianism: self-worth, dignity, unity, confidence, self reliance, race pride, spirituality and freedom from colonialism.

The Triple Helix components are three distinct events that reinforced each other:

- The best example of African resistance history culminating in the Ethiopia history of resistances during the Scramble for Africa. (e.g. the Adwa Victory). Helix I (1896)
- The World Union of Ethiopians (Africans), from outside Africa – pan-African congresses Helix II (1900)
- The First Liberation Movement, ANC, with spiritualism and Ethiopianism preceding its formation as its inspiration (1912)

### **3. ADWA VICTORY IS NOT OVER YET**

We say today the Adwa Victory Must Continue:

- To remove the unity deficit in Ethiopia.
- To remove the unity deficit in Africa.
- We still find it hard to unite.
- Donorisation divides not just groups and elites but also the African conscious agenda for unity.
- Adwa Victory is achieved through unity, resolve and self-reliance and not from begging donors as our African elites scramble today forgetting Africa is too rich to beg donors at all. What Africa needs is to build the strong liberation and independent imagination to use African own resources to build Africa’s worthy and dignified future.
- Let us draw lessons that endure and build the African united and free future through the symbolic example of what all united Ethiopians achieved for Africa as a whole.

### 3.1. Adwa Victory must continue to revive Ethiopianism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Ethiopianism provided the foundation of pan-Africanism by providing the spiritual public good for the anti-colonial movement in the African World
- Ethiopianism still provides to this day the spiritual public good against fragmentation by virtue of the union of Ethiopians from America to Southern Africa
- Ethiopianism can thus be revived to provide the spiritual public good also for the African Renaissance

### 3.2. For Africa as a whole, continuing the Adwa Victory today means:

- Continuing Ethiopianism as Pan-Africanism.
- Locating firmly the values of Ethiopianism to anchor also the African Renaissance
- Removing colonialism for good in Africa.
- Full unity and dignity by removing the current unity and dignity deficits in Africa.
- For Africa as a whole to prove a free liberation logocentric imagination by defeating econocentric donorising elites that allow the donorisation of the African agenda by pursuing to attract external aid when Africa loses by permitting unprecedented flow out of its resources through this cynical donorisation schemes that followed from formal colonialism to prevent a post-colonial Africa to emerge fully and confidently.

### 3.3. For Ethiopia, Adwa Victory Continues means:

- Valuing, learning and cherishing civic Ethiopian identity and Not building barriers and fences of ethnicity, linguistic and religious differentiations to undermine the shared similarity of 'Africaness-Ethiopianess', as if expressing the latter undermines the expression of full civic rights when in fact it provides the best non-locally, vernacularly, ethnically or religiously fenced framework to express full civic rights
- To learn to express civic rights directly with Ethiopian identity coupled with African identity and remove ethnic entrepreneurial approaches that undermines the civic anchored nationhood of Ethiopia.
- To continue to unite Ethiopia and learn to centre her to be at the core of the African Renaissance by retaining what made Ethiopianism attractive: self worth, confidence, self reliance, dignity, pride, resistance, spirituality, independence, liberation and freedom.

### 3.4. It is important for Adwa Victory to continue

- As one of the key founding pillars of the pan-African Helix and as a provider of Ethiopianism's spiritual public good by revitalizing self-worth, confidence, pride, self-reliance and liberation amongst free Africans
- Create liberation movements like the pillar of the ANC with strong values like the early ANC was shaped by Ethiopianism and spiritualism.
- Revivify the pillar of the Pan-African Congresses so that a global observatory to make all Africans free from harm can be actively promoted.
- Together with three helix we improve and build a strong and united, proud and free Africa!

#### 4. Adwa Victory for Ethiopianism, and Ethiopianism for Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance

Adwa Victory gave Ethiopianism to reach the African Diaspora and the colonized world directly. As the spiritual values of Ethiopianism laid the foundation for pan-Africanism to unite all Africans to fight colonialism and apartheid, the same values that Ethiopianism as pan-Africanism has been founded on are needed also to realize and inspire the African renaissance today by enabling Africa to emerge as an independent, strong and proud leader rather than mere follower of former colonial powers in the 21st century. Ethiopianism for Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance should be promoted in this year of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance that the AU has declared to be recognised this whole year that marks the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) fifty years ago since May 25, 1963.

The Adwa Victory is the core driver of Ethiopianism and celebrating Adwa Victory must not just be the work of Ethiopians but also the work of all Africans the world over. Though still a lot remains to be done to spread awareness, I am happy to acknowledge on March 1 to March 3, various seminars are being held in Ethiopia, South Africa, by the Pan-African friends from the Caribbean and Europe in Britain, the Ethiopian Heritage Society in America, Australia, Netherlands and elsewhere. We must make every Yekatit to be Adwa Victory Month so that vast education is prompted across the world. Let us all unite and acknowledge the brilliant success of our ancestors by standing up tall and declaring Long live Adwa Victory.

For all Ethiopians, the principal message is that do not sacrifice a great Ethiopian history by confusing it with the challenges facing the country today. It is better to learn the lessons of history to shape a united and free future by strengthening the civic nationhood of Ethiopia that brought the Adwa victory so decisively.

*"It was a national epic, the founding event in the modern life of the nation. The stately northward march of Menelik and Taytu not only consolidated their rule but called upon the Ethiopian people—Tigrayans, Shoans, Oromo, Welayta, and others—to set aside their differences and, in recognizing a common enemy, recognize a common nationhood. Nations, if they are to endure, are defined not by religion, ethnicity, or race but by the scale at which freedom can reliably be defended. Only on the scale of Ethiopia itself could resistance have succeeded" Raymond Jonas, African Victory over the Age of Empire*

#### **5. ADWA VICTORY FOR AFRICA AND THE WORLD, THE ADWA VICTORY REVEVIFIES ETHIOPIANISM FOR PAN AFRICANISM AND THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

*Ethiopianism provided to all oppressed Africans the spiritual public good to express their self-worth, self-esteem, pride, confidence, liberation, resistance, spirituality and self-reliance that people who were suffering racial oppression in the new world and Southern Africa drew from their understanding of what Ethiopia meant to the racially oppressed in the world in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century until Ethiopianism evolved into Pan-Africanism after the First World War.*

*As the spiritual values of Ethiopiansim laid the foundation for Pan-Africanism to unite all Africans to fight colonialism and apartheid, the same values that Ethiopiansim as Pan-Africanism has been founded with such as self-worth, self-confidence, self-reliance and liberation are much needed to realize fully the African renaissance to enable Africa to emerge as an independent, strong and proud leader rather than mere follower of former colonial powers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If we stand for liberation in our time, we must revive Ethiopianism as the core anchor of pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.*

*Forward ever with Ethiopianism, backward never so all can clearly see the spiritual and moral power of Ethiopianism for our time in this year which the African Union has declared as the year of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.*

## **Information Sources:**

<http://www.nesglobal.org/adwa>  
<http://www.nesglobal.org/oau50>

## **CAUSES TO JOIN**

**The cause to dedicate Yekatit the unity education month:**

<http://www.causes.com/causes/652641-yekatit-for-unity-education-month/about>

**We have the demand to dedicate every May as African Unity and Liberation Month.**

<http://www.causes.com/causes/646713-african-unity-can-make-africa-s-free...>

Composed by: Mammo Muchie: DST/NRF Research Professor on Science, Technology, Innovation and Development (STI4D), p/t Professor, DIR, Aalborg University Denmark; Senior Research Associate, SLPMTD, Oxford University , UK. E-mail: mammo.muchie@gmail.com