

**Title: From 119 This Year to 120 Next Year :  
Celebrating Adwa Victory as the Significant  
African Victory over World Empire  
By Mammo Muchie<sup>i</sup>**

**Presented first on 27 February, Kara Heritage  
Institute, Pretoria, South Africa  
(<http://www.kara.co.za/>)**

**NES COMMENTARY No.38**

**Network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES)**



**March 2, 2015**

**Inspiration**

*”Although it had been conquered dozens of times, Ethiopia was the birthplace of African nationalism.” Nelson Mandela, in his Long Walk to Freedom, p.402*

*“Ethiopia has always held a special place in my own 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.”(ibid.)*

## **1. Introduction**

**It is an honour to be invited by Kara Heritage Institute celebrating by combining together critically important events to transform the an unacceptable and unending colonial condition that Africans continue to experience where ever they are to this day: The 1896 decisive Adwa Victory, the 1926 African American History week, and now month initiated by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the release of the South African anti-apartheid icon, Former president Nelson Mandela and other comrades, and the determination to make the May Liberation month and May 25 to be celebrated by making it also a South African “African national annual Day”. These combinations are unique and we appreciate Kara Heritage Institute very much for using this important moment to start this celebration with the liberation synthesis of a decisive African victory with world significance, release of freedom fighters, celebration of African-Americans to be freed from racism and the recognition of the African liberation month every May annually by especially recognising May 25, 2015 as Africa liberation day to make it genuinely an African unity day celebrated everywhere in Africa and not as it is now in a few African states.**

**It is also very important that South Africa plays a significant role and humbly take the role of the African captain leading the African compass to navigate the complexities of world politics and economics so that African can sail free from all forms of obstructions to emerge as its own leader with the right to have its own agency to govern all its affairs with independence and freedom. All negative reactions that we see such as attacks on other Africans must be challenged with South Africa coming strong as the real African above all else. Some of us came to South Africa**

**with a passion to realise a South Africa that plays a leading role as doing, being and spreading the African agenda with humility, integrity, sincerity and honesty. We very much look forward and remain hopeful that South Africa will never fail Africa. South Africa must put Africa first above all else. Few South Africans consistently speak, teach and discuss Ethiopianism as the initiator of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. Dr Mathole , the founder of Kara Heritage, Dr. Thabo Mbeki, the former President and our great inspirational rare African leader Madiba have spoken consistently about Ethiopianism linking with pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, but I have not heard from others outside university circles as much as we expect from South Africa on Pan-Africanism given some of us coming from other parts of Africa for example myself from Ethiopia think and believe strongly South Africa should be the leading moral, spiritual and intellectual resource to free Africa for good.**

**The victory of Adwa had profound significance across the world particularly to all Africans across the world. The African diaspora protested and also in much of Africa there were spontaneous demonstration carrying posters supporting the Adwa Victory and opposing the imperialist attack. From Brazil to South Africa there was genuine support for realising the Adwa Victory in 1896.**

## **2.Looking back to look far ahead to free African Futures**

**Africa can look back and bring back the ideals and ethos of Ethiopianism to meet the challenges of the unfinished business of African unity, and to stand up to the new and emerging challenges that are more subtle and insidious than the challenges that were faced during slavery, colonialism, and Apartheid. Africa is now in a situation reminiscent of the olden days. It has not removed coloniality by making sure Africans learn to colonise themselves by making sure others are prevented from continuing to dominate and control Africa by various means. There cannot be any better time than these trying times to bring back the discursive arsenals from the early African struggles of resistance under the rubric of**

**Ethiopianism. The powerful narratives that were developed around Ethiopianism are of such significance that they continue to inform the debates on the current quest for African unity and Renaissance. The Victory of Adwa strengthened Ethiopianism, Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.**

### **3. Ethiopianism the Foundation of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance**

**The early flashes of Ethiopianism date back to the sixteenth century, when African-American blacks as slaves in America found solace in the promise of a homeland in the empire of the Ethiopia of the Nile region. The references to Ethiopia in the Bible provided them with an ideology that they could use for their spiritual, political, and cultural uplifting. The blacks in America, the West Indies, Europe, and in Africa itself derived enormous inspiration from the Scriptures, where the word 'Ethiopia' occurs more than forty times. By far the most widely-quoted verse, "probably the most widely quoted verse in Afro-American religious history", is Psalm 68:31 – "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall stretch her hands unto God". The verse was interpreted as pointing to the end of the curse on the black race – an end to the alienation of Africa from God. This was a European belief that was, to some extent, shared by Africans... Thus came into being the movement of Ethiopianism as a "method of winning Africa for Christ" and as a "forerunner of the "Africa for Africans" movement and the subsequent African philosophies to bring African unity to confront imperialist power. Some saw the beginning of the fulfilment of this prophetic verse on the political level. After the 1792-1800 successful slave insurrection in Haiti, it was declared: "Thus doth Ethiopia begin to stretch forth her hand, from the sink of slavery, to freedom and equality" (Dread History, undated). The verse gave rise to "a biblically-rooted pan-African hermeneutic" that later became a widely used source of inspiration and legitimisation to inspire Africans to continue the struggle against colonial domination.**

**In both America and Southern Africa, the Ethiopianism movement was first a reaction to the discrimination in ecclesiastical administration and the outright marginalisation of black clergymen. The black clergymen underwent demeaning acts of de-selection for**

ordination and promotion to the clerical echelons. They were denied their deserved promotion to the higher ranks of the clergy for no other reason than the colour of their skin. The white mission churches had it as their unwritten bylaws that the ordination of blacks was to be avoided. Even where a black clergyman was ordained, he was stripped of the authority and privilege that he was supposed to have had by virtue of his ordination. The fact that this act of discrimination took place in locations as far apart as America and South Africa over a long period of time is proof that it was rather a systemic practice than a symptom of sporadic racism. The spread of the anti-racist theology to emerge in the form of Ethiopianism across South Africa, “the pernicious Ethiopian propaganda” as the white authorities characterised it then, so deeply threatened the white supremacists that they legislated to ban it.

The first notable withdrawal from the white churches in Southern Africa took place when Nehemiah Tile, a minister who rose to prominence as an accomplished preacher in Thembuland, seceded from the Wesleyan Methodist church in 1884 – a hundred years after the first black church was established by Richard Allen in America. Tile’s move was the first salvo heralding a long history of the Ethiopianism movement in Africa. It was such a significant milestone in the history of the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa that Nelson Mandela himself paid tribute to the Thembu Church a century later:

*African clergymen sought to free themselves from the fetters of white missionaries by establishing African Independent Churches. One of the most celebrated breakaways was that of Nehemiah Tile who founded the Tembu Church in the Transkei in 1884.... 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 organisation to the Ethiopian movement of the 1890s (Address by Nelson Mandela to the Free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa, 14 December 1992).*

The next major event in the history of Ethiopianism was the establishment of Reverend Mangena Mokone’s church. After resigning from the Wesleyan Methodist church in Pretoria, he set up his own church and called it the Ethiopian Church of South Africa. Mokone quickly established alliances with the American black

**churches that shared a similar history of discrimination and had passed through a similar route to independence. The number of Ethiopian churches was growing at an alarming rate for the white authorities. "Ethiopia" became the label for independent African churches that seceded from the white mission churches. As Shepperson recounts, by 1912 in South Africa, the Ethiopianism movement has resulted in seventy-six independent churches, and three decades later the number had jumped to over eight hundred (Shepperson, 1953). With their own specific history and denomination, Ethiopian churches are now believed to be in thousands in number.**

**Ethiopianism was a truly an all-African movement; it was not a phenomenon confined only to the Southern African region or the African diaspora in America. Garvey extensively used the Ethiopian discourse in the thinking that was later known as Garveyism.**

**It was recited in the speeches for the motion to establish the South African Native National Congress; the precursor of the ANC .Ethiopianism was a movement that fuelled the anti-colonial struggle in Eastern and Western Africa too. Jomo Kenyatta, certainly inspired by the movement, is quoted as saying that Ethiopianism was the most popular religious sect. In the then-Nyasaland, the 1915 uprising led by John Chilembwe, a Baptist minister who like other Ethiopianists, broke away from the mission church, espoused Ethiopianism to finally become a national hero of independent**

**Malawi. As late as the dying years of colonialism, Ethiopianism was fully in operation, as is evidenced by the establishment of the Kenyan Church of Christ in Africa in 1957 withdrawing from the Anglican sect in the same fashion as the rest of the Ethiopian churches.**

**Ethiopianism continued to animate the anti-colonial and anti-Apartheid struggles, even in the 1970s and 1980s. The significance of its philosophy continues to inspire historians and scholars to this day. .The essence of Ethiopianism was articulated by one of the founders of the Ethiopian churches as being a movement aimed: *“To plant a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating African Church which would produce a truly African type of Christianity suited to the genius and needs of the race and not a black copy of any European Church”***

**These ideals, in their political dimensions, are the ideals that Africa has not yet realised and are still struggling to achieve. It is to be reckoned that Ethiopianism has become even more relevant in the current context of realising Africa’s full agency, self-worth, dignity and pride in the twenty-first century. “Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance”; the theme of the jubilee of the OAU-AU strongly resonates with the ethos of Ethiopianism. The significance that the movement acquired over the centuries and the multiple meanings in which it was understood have enriched the idea and augmented its potency as a source of inspiration for free, united and independent Africans across the world.**

#### **4. Key Lasting Ethiopianism’s Signature to Freeing Africa**

**Ethiopianism opposed racist theology with the creation of independent churches in both the Americas, the Diaspora and in Africa. Ethiopianism created the ecclesiastical space for incubating political movements such as the African national Congress. The first president of the ANC, John Dube, was identified by the white authorities as “a pronounced Ethiopian who ought to be watched” and many were arrested and some even killed for their**

**Ethiopianism. The Pan African association initiated by Henry Sylvester Williams in 1897 was inspired by Ethiopianism. Garvey extensively used the Ethiopian discourse in the thinking that was later known as Garveyism. Rastafarianism arose as a sequel of the Ethiopianism that was prevalent before it in Jamaica.**

**Ethiopianism is the starting philosophy and movement of Pan-Africanism and the current African Renaissance must be recognised. Ethiopianism offers the requisite explanation that would put flesh on the bare bones of the African Renaissance concept. What former president brother Mbeki has defined as African Renaissance is very much what Ethiopianists were demanding. The essence of Ethiopianism was crisply put by the Zimbabwean historian, Mutero Chirenje, as follows: “Ethiopianism became a generic term to describe a whole range of the black man’s efforts to improve his religious, educational and political experience”**

**Africans to know where they are going requires they comprehend the difficult journey of where they came from. Everything is moved but memory. The historical memory of resistance with Ethiopianism is a start to explore why Africans should have united yesterday, not today and even tomorrow. African Unity must be now not in 2063!**

**Adwa Victory reinforced Ethiopianism. Ethiopianism reinforced pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism reinforced the Africa Renaissance. They are one in three and three into one. The best high way of liberation is signalled by the successful resistance of the Adwa Victory of 1896. Any other way is not the African freeway. Africans must value and cherish their history. They must remember the Adwa Victory will live on; and until Africa is fully free and united, the Adwa Victory will continue alive! It makes us all never to give up resisting all varieties of injustice Africans are still not free from. The African sun shine of freedom will shine ever brighter by remembering the great African Adwa Victory. This victory lives on in the eternal river of time.**



**For pan-Africanists across the world, Adwa Victory also makes Ethiopia as Africa as the epitome of African nationalism. Ethiopia is not just for those in Ethiopia, it is the moral and spiritual national resource for all Africans across the world. I shall conclude with the words of our icons Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and our beloved Tata Madiba to reinforce why Ethiopia is for all Africans and not just for those who currently live in the current Ethiopian geographic space.**

**In his biography Dr. Kawme Nkrumah relates his reaction to the fascist assault against Ethiopia. He was in London at the time of the savage attack on the way to the United States, when he saw the newspaper poster, “Mussolini Invades Ethiopia.” He said he was immediately and naturally seized by a strong outrage. Dr. Nkrumah said: “At that moment”, he wrote, “It was almost as if the whole of London had declared war on me personally. For the next few minutes I could do nothing but glare at each impassive face, wondering if these people could realise the wickedness of colonialism, and praying that the day might come when I could play my part in bringing about the downfall of such a system. My nationalism surged to the fore; I was ready to go to hell itself, if need be, in order to achieve my object.”(Quoted in John. H. Brown, Public Diplomacy Press Review, USC Centre for Public Diplomacy, May 22, 2004)**

**Our revered Nelson Mandela felt a similar outrage: “I was seventeen when Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, an invasion that spurred not only my hatred of that despot but of fascism in general.”(Nelson Mandela, Long walk to Freedom, p.402)**

**Let us all resolve Ethiopia must live on as a cradle of African nationalism that it is as is inscribed in history!**

## **5.Concluding Remark**

**March 2, 2015 marked the 119 years of the great Adwa Victory. March 2, 2016 will mark the 120<sup>th</sup> Adwa Victory. We call upon all Africans across the world to start a vast education for the whole year by producing a variety of resources, activities, shows, exhibitions and artistic, scientific, philosophic reflections by**

**demonstrating the relevance and significance of the Adwa Victory in the past, present and future to complete African full freedom, liberation, dignity, pride and self-worth now and in the future. We should start with our children from kindergarten to all in every arena of social, public, cultural economic and artistic life across the Africana world. The Africa Union, all the current African states, the entire African Diaspora and even all those nations across the world that have been colonised should make it a special day and work specially in February until March 2, 2016 to make this a special time for spreading vast education and awareness to reach every African child, woman and man across the world. We call upon all Ethiopians to unthink ethnicity to re-think, and defend Ethiopia as the great Madiba recognised her as a significant African nationalism heritage foundation, providing the spiritual resource for African liberation.**

**Let us also unlearn dividing ourselves in linguistic and religious enclaves to re-learn by going beyond the fragmenting and fracturing divisive variations and diversities and appreciate and celebrate our Africaness similarity to bring in reality the enduring historic contribution Ethiopia possesses as the provider of the spiritual public good for completing African liberation.**

**We call upon the Government in Ethiopia to start allowing all the people to engage in this liberation thought by appreciating the great contribution that Adwa Victory provided to strengthen Ethiopianism as the foundation for Pan-Africanism and the African renaissance. We ask all to begin now the preparation for a great global and universal moment of March 2, 2016 or Yekatit 23, 2008(Eth. Cal.)**

---

***Mammo Muchie: DPhil and SARChI DST/NRF Research Professor, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa, ASTU, Ethiopia and TMDC, Oxford University, UK. Contact: [mammo.muchie@gmail.com](mailto:mammo.muchie@gmail.com) & [www.sarchi-steid.org.za/](http://www.sarchi-steid.org.za/) [www.nesglobal.org](http://www.nesglobal.org) . Heart felt appreciation to my former post-doc who is now working in ACTS in Kenya, Dr. Hailemichael Demissie for***

---

**all his contribution to the work we did in excavating the Ethiopianism resources that still remain as not fully researched yet.**