

**The Political Economy of the Eritrean War of Independence  
1961 - 1991**

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Academic requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Economic History

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December 2021

## **Declaration**

I, Mustafa Mohammedosman Ahmed, student number 202523597, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work. It is hereof submitted to fulfil the Academic requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Economic History at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. I confirm that this thesis has not previously been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other University. Where I have used the work of other authors, I have properly referenced in accordance with the requirement of the School of Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, I have not copied any author or scholars' work with the purpose of passing it as my own.

Student signature

Date

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks to Almighty God for making this study reach its completion.

This study and the whole doctoral process would not have been possible without the guidance, patience, and dedication of my supervisor Dr Joseph Rudigi Rukema. He worked on this thesis right from the beginning relentlessly. I owe Dr Joseph Rudigi Rukema an intellectual debt.

I extend my appreciation to all who participated in the study by being willing to be interviewed and answer the questions I prepared. I also extend my appreciation to all family members and friends who encouraged me to complete the study.

## **ABSTRACT**

The political economy of the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI) examines the power relationships that were unfolded during the War. In this study, political economy refers to the making and administering of power. The political economy approach to the EWI presents a new theoretical perspective to understanding war. The making and administering of power manifests itself through power struggle that occurs during war. Therefore, power struggle determines power relationships of the forces that are involved in the war. This study entails three major themes. The first theme addresses the prelude to the EWI and the background to the power struggle unfolded during the War. The second theme addresses international involvements in the wars of the horn of Africa and their impacts on the EWI. The third theme examines the formation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) that started the EWI in 1961 and its implosion in 1969.

This study used qualitative research method and data was collected through in-depth interviews and from written personal accounts of the EWI. It also used secondary sources such as books and articles. The target population of this study were veterans who participated in the EWI and served at different leadership positions during the War. The rationale behind selecting the veterans of the EWI who served in different leadership positions during the EWI. Their leadership positions enabled them to possess comprehensive knowledge of the power struggle unfolded during the War. In-depth interviews with 20 Eritrean veterans who participated in the EWI at leadership levels and critical positions were conducted.

The findings of the study are presented in four themes. The first theme discusses the prevalence of power struggle during the EWI. The prevalence of power struggle included individual power struggle, negative experiences of failed military administrative structures,

conflict among military commanders, the role of reform movement, and implosion of ELF. The second theme discusses how and why civil war ensued among different armed factions in the aftermath of the implosion of the ELF. The third theme focusses on the breakaway groups that split from the ELF, and the formation of the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF). The fourth and final theme compares the ELF and the EPLF as two competing and rival armed organizations during the second half of the 30-year war period, and how the EPLF won the war of independence. The final theme also highlights the contribution of the EWI to the State formation in Eritrea.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BMA – British Military Administration  
BMME – British Military Mission to Ethiopia  
ELF – Eritrean Liberation Front  
ELF-RC – Eritrean Liberation Front – Revolutionary Council  
ELM – Eritrean Liberation Movement  
EML – Eritrean Muslim League  
EPLF – Eritrean People’s Liberation Front  
EPRP – Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party  
ESP – Eritrean Socialist Party  
EWI – Eritrean War of Independence  
FC – Field Command  
FRG – Federal Republic of Germany  
GC – General Command  
GDP – Gross Domestic Product  
GDR – German Democratic Republic  
HDI – Human Development Index  
LRA – Lord Resistance Army  
LP – Labor Party  
NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations  
OLF – Oromo Liberation Front  
ONLF – Ogaden National Liberation Front  
PGC – Provisional General Command  
PLF – People’s Liberation Front  
RC – Revolutionary Command / Council  
SC – Supreme Council  
SCP – Sudanese Communist Party  
SIPRI – Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

SNM – Somaliland National Movement

SPLM/ A – Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/ Army

TPLF – Tigray People’s Liberation Front

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNT – United Nations Trusteeship

UP – Unionist Party

USA – United States of America

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WSLF – Western Somali Liberation Front

WW II – World War Two

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# **Chapter 1**

## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Preamble**

This study examines the political economy of the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI) in the context of power relationships that were unfolded during the War. The chapter is divided into five sections. Section one of the introductory chapter presents an introduction to the study and highlights the making and administering of power during the EWI. Section two provides the background to the study and highlights debates around the EWI. Section three presents the problem statement and scope of the study. It highlights the significance of the political economy approach to war, and it explains the rationale for choosing the topic of the study and implications for further study. Section four outlines the objectives of the study and key questions addressed in the study. Finally, section five presents the structure of the chapters of the study. It also includes brief outlines of the content of each chapter.

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study has established the political economy approach to the Eritrean war of independence. Political economy in this regard implies making and administering of power during the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI). The making and administering of power has been explained in the context of its effects to power relationships. Examining the effects of making and administering of power during War to power relationships is a gap in the up-and-coming political economy approach to war. Most of the existing literature on political economy

approach to war focus on war and the State (Robert H, 1990; William, 1998; Evans, Rueschemeyer, Skocpol, 1985); war as a process of socio-economic restructuring and progressive consequences (Duffield, 2001; Berdal & Malone, 2000; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998; Cramer, 2006); and economies of war or war and resources (Billion, 2007).

The effects of the production and distribution of power during the EWI to power relationships among various armed groups that fought the War is the central theme of this study. The process of production and distribution of power during the EWI is presented as power struggle over power. The power struggle that occurred during the EWI are divided into three stages of the War. The first stage covers the period that started from the formation of the pioneer armed organization called the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1961 until its implosion in 1969. The power struggle that occurred during the first stage reflected individual, tribal, and regional based sectarian power struggle. The nature of the power struggle during the first stage also reflected struggle between the forces that attempted to hold onto the status quo and new generation of leadership who wanted to change the situation. The second stage covers the period from the implosion of the ELF in 1969 that involved emergence of breakaway factions and civil war between the former and the latter that continued until 1975. The power struggle that occurred during the second stage reflected a failure of the younger generation of leadership to resolve persisted sectarian problems. The third stage covers two parts: one, that the period that started after the end of the civil war in 1975 until the occurrence of two rival Eritrean armed organizations called the ELF and the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF); second, that the EPLF dominated the War and liberated Eritrea. The power struggle that occurred during the third stage reflected a formation of two different types of leadership. In this study, the leadership style that developed in the ELF is explained as lenient and democratic, while the leadership style that developed in the EPLF is explained as highly centralized and militant. A rival power struggle between the ELF and the EPLF ended with the defeat of the former and triumphant of

the latter. The EPLF won the EWI in 1991 and formed the new State of Eritrea. The highly centralized and militant nature of the EPLF leadership manifested itself in the newly established government of Eritrea. As a result, a totalitarian system of governance took power.

## **1.2 Background**

As a background, the political economy approach to war also sees war as a mechanism to achieve a calculated outcome (Coyne, 2011). From this political economy perspective, and considering the severity of any war, it can be related that the Eritreans waged the Independence War with expectations to have an independent country as an outcome regardless of its cost. On the other side, the Ethiopian counterparts attempted to keep Eritrea annexed at any cost. Therefore, it can be inferred that each side was willing to pay any cost to achieve its goals. The EWI lasted for 30 years, which was from 1961 to 1991. The war erupted amid a crisis of a federal arrangement that annexed Eritrea to Ethiopia in 1952. The federal arrangement between the two countries existed officially from September 1952 until November 1962. The federal arrangement followed a 10-year British Military Administration (BMA) that officially lasted from 1941 to 1952. The BMA occupied Eritrea after defeating Italy in war in Eritrean territories in 1941. Italy colonized Eritrea from 1890 until 1941 (Markakis, 1987; Gebre-Medhin, 1989, Iyob, 1995; Kibreab, 2008). Therefore, it can be inferred that the main root claim of the Eritrean case for independence goes back to the Italian colonial territorial definition and occupation. Most of the former colonial territories in different parts of the globe have emerged as independent States. However, decolonization in Eritrea took a different route (Iyob, 1995). Italian colonization was replaced by the BMA that led to the annexation of Eritrea to Ethiopia through a federal arrangement. Consequently, the Eritreans started the War in September 1961

demanding a right to self-determination. The war lasted for 30 years before Eritrea gained its independence in 1991 (Markakis, 1987; Gebre-Medhin, 1989, Iyob, 1995; Kibreab, 2008).

The EWI has been explained in two forms in existing literature. The first explanation deals with factors that preceded the war (Gebre-Medhin, 1989; Patman, 1990; Negash, 1997). The second explanation focusses on the commencement of the EWI, and the problems that unfolded within the armed factions that fought the War (Habte Selassie, 1982; Markakis, 1987; Iyob, 1995; Kibreab, 2008). The first explanation highlights the process of decolonization and how it unraveled in Eritrea. Eritrea as a former Italian colony had a right to self-determination like all former colonized territories in different parts of the world. Italy as a colonial power was defeated by the British and Eritrea was placed under its Colonial Military Administration. The British did not pave the way for Eritrea's self-determination. In the process, Ethiopia's interests in wanting to have a Sea outlet derailed Eritrea's right to self-determination. Consequently, the case was handed over to the United Nations (UN). This resulted in the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. However, it was Ethiopia's ambition to incorporate Eritrea as its territorial part, this was in violation of the Federal arrangement and annexed Eritrea in 1962. The second explanation about the EWI on existing literature entails arguments which attempted to examine historical and social contexts of the fragmentations and factionalism that occurred during the 30-year period of armed struggle for Eritrea's Independence.

This study also highlights the importance of examining the Cold War era superpower countries' interferences to understand the post-Cold War Wars. Most of the existing literature focus on the post-Cold War era Wars (Duffield, 2001; Berdal & Malone, 2000; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998; Cramer, 2006). In this study, examining the Cold War era Wars entails discussing international interferences in the Wars that occurred in developing countries such as the countries in the horn of Africa. The horn of Africa is a complex region, that conflict in one country affects the rest of the countries in the region (Colin and Bill, 1977; Erlich, 1983; Deng,

2007). The Cold War era international interferences in the horn of Africa affected all parties that were involved in Wars during the given era. In this regard, international interferences were manifested through providing military assistance to warring sides (governments as well as rebel groups). The military assistance included provisions of weapons, and military and political trainings (Spencer, 1977; Ayoob, 1978; Habte Selassie, 1982; Ottaway, 1982; Patman, 1990).

The EWI took place during the era of the Cold War that occurred after the end of World War II (WW II). Rivalry between the two Cold War Superpowers – the United States of America (USA) and Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) – manifested competition for larger global influence (Habte Selassie, 1982; Patman, 1990). Arms supply was a key instrument used by the superpowers in the process of buying client States in different parts of the world (Habte Selassie, 1982; Patman, 1990). The horn of Africa was one of the regions that were affected by the Superpowers' interferences. The proliferation of arms during the Cold War era affected the countries of the horn of Africa immensely. Research shows that the horn of Africa is a complex region with linked conflict history (Bell, 1973; Colin and Bill 1977; Ayoob, 1978; Habte Selassie, 1982; Patman, 1990). The EWI was the major War in its magnitude, intensity, and length fought in the region (Erich, 1983; Iyob, 1995). Some other wars that occurred in the horn of Africa include the South Sudan War that occurred between 1955 and 1972 and again between 1983 and 2005. The Wars that occurred between Ethiopia and Somalia took place during the 1960s and the 1970s (Beshir, 1968; M.Wai, 1973; Ottaway, 1982; Johnson, 2003). The intensity of arms<sup>1</sup> transfers and military assistance that was provided to governments and rebels in the horn of Africa during the Cold War comprises an important aspect of this study. In this regard, this study treats the EWI as part of the horn of Africa that was at the receiving end of arms supplied by the USA, the USSR, Israel, Syria, and Iraq.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the two main categories of Arms are the conventional and non-conventional weapons. The non-conventional weapons are also known as “small arms and light weapons”.

In this study, the beginning of the EWI is divided in two phases of formation. The first phase covered from 1959 to September 1961. The second phase started in September 1961. The first phase involved initiative to form a political structure in exile that aimed to start a War of Independence. The initiative for the first phase was taken by three socio-political groups from the Eritrean societies. The three groups were: 1) exiled Eritrean students based in Cairo 2) veteran Eritrean political leaders, who were part of the Eritrean nationalist movements during the 1940s in Eritrea 3) Eritreans who served in the Sudanese Military Forces (SMF). The former two formed the political organization that they named the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in July 1960. The second phase formation of the beginning of the EWI was – in a coordination with the former soldiers in the SMF and a prominent person inside Eritrea – the War of independence was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1961. Therefore, it can be inferred that the ELF started the EWI on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1961.

In the beginning of September 1961, the ELF was small and ill equipped. Eritrean Independence fighters (aka freedom fighters) were fewer until a significant number joined them gradually. As an armed group, they were referred to as the Eritrean Liberation Army (ELA) (Ammar, 1992). On the counterparts, the Ethiopian government had both Eritrea and Ethiopia under its authority; therefore, it had upper hand in manpower and resources control. However, few years down the war line, the ELF was able to grow and managed to get sympathy from some countries in the Middle East. They provided the ELF with some military assistance such as weapons and military training. On the other side, the Ethiopian government received support from the US and the USSR (Ayyob, 1978; Habte Selassie, 1982; Makinda, 1992).

Between 1961 and 1965, the ELF still in its nascent stage. Its leadership were divided into the political leadership that was based abroad and the military commanders (ELA leaders) that were based inside Eritrea. The political leadership was led by a leadership that was known as the Supreme Council (SC). The SC was dominated by three key leaders: the Chairman, the



Military Head, and the Foreign Mission. The relationships between the SC and the ELA leaders did not show any problem. Problems surface with the introduction of dividing the ELA into five Military Administrative Zones (MAZ) in 1965. The SC emulated the idea of dividing the ELA into MAZ from the Algerian National Liberation Front, which was a nationalist movement during the Algerian war (Markakis, 1987; Iyob, 1995; Kibreab, 2008).

The emulation of the Algerian model was a failure. Sectarian problems surfaced. The relationships among the key leaders of the SC and between the SC and the ELA leaders deteriorated. A reform movement attempted to resolve the problems, but conflict over power persisted. In 1969 the ELF imploded, and several breakaway groups emerged. The main explanation regarding causes of the internal frictions within the ELF revolves around tribal, religious, and regional sectarian tendencies (ibid). As a consequence of the ELF's implosion, the power struggle among the factions led to bloodshed that was referred to as a civil war. The civil war continued until 1975. After the end of the civil war, frictions took organizational form: the ELF vs the breakaway factions. The breakaway factions consolidated their forces and formed a joint organization called the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF). By the end of the 1970s there were two strong armed organizations: the ELF and the EPLF. At the end of the 1980, the two organizations clashed, and a civil war ensued that lasted till 1981. In the process, the EPLF emerged as the winner, while the ELF lost the power struggle. In 1991, the EPLF liberated Eritrea and transformed itself to a government (Iyob, 1995; Pool, 2001).

The main problem examined in this study was the contribution of the EWI to power relationships among various political forces. Although there is plethora of materials available regarding the EWI, the effects of the War time production and distribution of power to power relationships among various political forces has not been examined thoroughly in various studies. The originality of the study is that it applied the political economy approach to examine the effects of War to power relationships.

### **1.3 Problem Statement and Scope of the Study**

The contribution of the EWI to power relationships among various stakeholders of the country has not been investigated. This study broadly investigated how the EWI contributed to power relationships among various Eritrean forces, and how the outcome shaped the state formation in Eritrea. In doing so, the focus has been on how the actual war contributed to the process of making and administering of power. The making and administering of power are used to refer to the formation and control of political power and leadership structures. The process of formation and control of political power and leadership structures is referred to as power struggle. In addition to the internal Eritrean dynamics, the Cold War period has been examined as a major contributing factor to the war. Regional dynamics and international intervention in the horn of Africa, as a complex region, during the Cold War, has been broadly investigated. The role of the USA and the USSR in supporting and abating the war has been scrutinized. The geo-politics of the Red Sea region and the horn of Africa has been explored.

The political economy approach to the EWI makes a significant contribution to the up-and-coming political economy approach to war. This is by identifying the effects of war to power relationships and its final effects to the State in war ravaged countries. The novelty of the study is that it contributes to the more current attempts to identify links between war, security, and economic failure and/or growth. This study triangulates the relationships between war, power relationships and state formation.

The rationale for choosing the topic is to examine the contribution of the EWI to power relationships, and its effects to the newly formed State of Eritrea. The newly formed State has faced challenges not only for being a new State, but mainly due to the legacy of the 30-year War. This study argues that a political economy approach helps to understand the EWI

rigorously. This study argues that a political economy approach is crucial to understand the contribution of the EWI to power relationships among various social and economic groups and to examine complications the new State has faced.

Finally, the study will have relevant implications for further research projects on similar topics as well as policy making regarding conflicts and issues of economic development.

## **1.4 Study Objectives and Key questions addressed**

This study aims to examine the relationships between war, power relationships and state formation in Eritrea. Under the main objective, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To establish political economy approach to the EWI as a rigorous method to understanding power relationships and state formation
- To establish the contribution of the EWI to power relationships in Eritrea
- To highlight how the legacy of the EWI affected the newly formed State of Eritrea

Key questions addressed in the study:

- How does the EWI be assessed in the context of power struggles that were unfolded during the War?
- What are the contributions of the EWI to power relationships in Eritrea?
- How does the legacy of the EWI affected the newly formed State of Eritrea?

## **1.5 Structure of Dissertation**

This study is presented in the following eight chapters.

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

The first chapter is an introduction to the study. It focusses on the key problem addressed in the study, the background of the problem, the problem statement, and the study objectives.

## **Chapter Two: Towards the Political Economy Approach to the Eritrean War of Independence**

The Political Economy Approach to the Eritrean War of Independence highlights that although there has been an up-and-coming debate around the political economy approach to war, the significance of contribution of war to power relationships needs focus. This chapter examines the political economy approach to the Eritrean War of Independence thoroughly.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

This chapter presents the research methodology applied in this study. It entails research paradigm, research approach, and research design used in the study. The data design involves sample selection, data collection process and data analysis.

## **Chapter Four: The Eritrean War of Independence**

This chapter reviews the literature about the Eritrean War of Independence. This chapter classifies exiting literature about the Eritrean War of Independence into two categories. The first category discusses the factors that led to the Eritrean War of Independence. The second category discusses the War and the problems unfolded within the armed factions during the war.

## **Chapter Five: International Involvements and the Eritrean War of Independence**

This chapter focusses on the international actors' involvements in conflicts in the horn of Africa that occurred during the Cold War period. The international actors' involvement in the horn of Africa played a significant role in fueling Wars in the region. The international actors were the USA, the USSR, and some Middle East countries such as Syria and Iraq. This chapter highlights

the intensity and the magnitude of arms that were transferred to different governments and rebel movements in the horn of Africa and discusses its implications to the Eritrean War of Independence.

### **Chapter Six: ELF: From Formation to Implosion**

This chapter presents the crucial phases of the ELF which covers from its formation to its implosion during the first decade of the EWI.

### **Chapter Seven: Discussion of the Findings**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. The findings reflect the political economy of the Eritrean War of Independence in the context of how power relationships among various leaders, groups, and factions developed throughout the 30-year War period.

### **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

This chapter draws the main arguments of the study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Towards The Political Economy Approach to the Eritrean War of Independence**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter examines the theoretical framework that will serve as the basis for understanding Eritrea's War of Independence (EWI). Interest in studying the political economy of war is not new but over the years the interest has increased. The political economy of war approach is applied to explore various aspects of war. In this study, political economy refers to the making and administration of power and resources. Its emphasis is on how war affects the process of production and distribution of power. This study focuses on how the nature of power relationships is affected by the process of making and administration of power during the EWI. This chapter discusses various explanations of War and debates about different aspects of the political economy of War. Finally, it briefly highlights the political economy approach to the EWI in the context of power relationships that unfolded during the War.

#### **2.1 Defining War**

##### **2.1.1 Classical Definitions of War**

War is a complex phenomenon (Howard and Paret, 1976) which is problematic to define. Tuck (2005) attempted to define war in different contexts. War by its nature and outcome changes from time to time, the definition of war varies due to different contexts. In the past two decades, Marcus Tullius Cicero defined war as “dispute by force”. He stated that there are two ways of disputing things: “one by debate, the other by force” (Tuck, 2005: 134). Four centuries

later, Hugo Grotius defined war as an act undertaken for the purpose of peace, and, therefore, the end purpose of war was to lead human beings to peace (ibid: 132-133).

Adam Smith argues that war is related to a phenomenon that affects a country's economy negatively. War is costly. Modern governments that started entered wars were burdened with high costs. Their expenditures were depleted as the result of war and this required the extra mobilisation of resources such as increasing taxes. This increase in taxes would often led to public anger which often resulted in unrests. Thus, governments were "both unwilling and unable to increase their revenue in proportion to the increase of their expense" (Biernat, et al. 2010: 1595-1616).

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussian general and military theorist, Carl Von Clausewitz, is a formative source. He pictured two wrestlers and used that imagination to define war. Each of the wrestlers tries, by force, to compel his opponent to do his will and the immediate aim would be to ensure his opponent will not hit back. Based on his scenario, Clausewitz defined war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will". For him, the means of war is "force", and the "object" is imposing ones' will on the enemy (Haward and Paret, 1976: 75).

Quincy Wright definition of war consists of two aspects. In the first aspect, she defined war in the broadest sense that war is "a violent contact of distinct but similar entities". In this regard, the similar entities could be stars, animals, tribes, and modern nations. Violent contact means when stars collide, when a lion fights a tiger, when tribes fight against each other, and when nations fight. In the second aspect, Wright defined war in a context of "the legal condition which equally permits two or more hostile groups to carry on a conflict by armed force" (Wright, 1942: 8).

### **2.1.2 Wars of Independence**

War is also explained in the context of wars of independence. The emphasis of the traditional approach to wars of independence was on the discourse of decolonization. Decolonization meant, though vast as a concept, the colonized territory attained sovereign statehood while the colonial empire lost grip (Collins, 2016: 1). Decolonization as a counter to colonialism implies multifaceted phenomena. Decolonization entailed the emergence of a 'hegemonic' form of national consciousness, which reflected liberationist and anti-imperialist internationalism (Fanon, 1963: 98). This imply that a link can be made between decolonization and war of independence. They both imply the process of transferring power from the colonizer to the colonized.

In pre-World War I period, the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) was the most referred decolonization movement that resulted in the defeat of the British Empire and resulted in the formation of the USA (Coakley and Conn, 1975: 53 – 83). Post-World War II decolonization focused more on the end of the European colonial rule in Asia and Africa. In Asia, wars of independence broke out in Indonesia, the Malaya, and the Indochina (Grenville, 2005, 589-590). In Africa, the wars of independence included the Algerian War of Independence that lasted from 1954 to 1962 (McCormack, 2007), the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya that went from 1952 to 1960 (Plough, 1998), the Angolan War of Independence from 1961 to 1974 (Venter, 2018), the Namibian War of Independence that took place from 1962 to 1990 (Dale, 2014), and Zimbabwe's war of independence that went from 1965 to 1980 (Mlambo, 2014).

African Wars of Independence were fought to dismantle European colonial rule. The exceptional cases of Wars of Independence were that of Namibia and Eritrea. In the Namibian case, the War was against a neighbouring South Africa. In Eritrea, the war was against a neighbouring Ethiopia. The goal of the Wars in both Namibia and Eritrea was similar to the rest



of the African Wars of Independence which were to form independent sovereign states. As the result, both the Namibian and the Eritrean Liberation Wars lasted longer than the rest of the African Wars. The Eritrean War of Independence (EWI) was the longest of all as it lasted for 30 years (from 1961 to 1991).

The above samples of definitions of war do not provide sufficient understanding to what war is. To understand what war is, there is a need for in-depth interpretations and approaches on types and causes of war. Examining the political economy of war is an up-and-coming approach to better understand war. This chapter reviews the recent literature on political economy of war as imperative.

## **2.2 The political economy of war debate**

Up-and-coming publications dealing with the study of political economy of war abound. Political economy of war and the state (Jackson, 1990; Reno, 1998; Evans, Rueschemeyer, Skocpol, 1985), war-making and state making are interconnected (Tilly, 1985), war as a process of capital accumulation (Cramer, 2006), war as a process of socio-economic restructuring and progressive consequences (Duffield, 2001; Berdal & Malone, 2000; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998; Cramer, 2006). There is also literature on the economies of war or war and resources (Billion, 2007), and war as a process of resources mobilization mechanism (Collins, et al, 2003; Ballantine, 2005).

### **2.2.1 War and the State**

Most of the debate around war and the state in developing countries is centred around the failure of post-Cold War state, and how war created a conducive environment for controlling power and resources. According to Jackson (1990), 'state failure' is a phenomenon that occurs because of war and that it leads to shadow states or quasi-states emerging. According to Reno

(1998), illegal economic activities serve as the basis for establishing a state-of-the-art political power in parts of Africa and outside Africa when conflict arises over natural resources. In Reno's view, the role of individuals becomes decisive in the establishment of a new system of governance that renders the legally established government irrelevant (Reno, 1998: 30).

Tilly (1985) brought a different interpretation of war and the state through an examination of the interaction between war making and state making. Tilly's examination focuses more on the European State. This process may reflect on how some aspects of the phenomena in the so called 'failed states' in developing countries have unfolded. Tilly's main arguments were that government's (or those who controlled leadership positions) interest in engaging at war involves the exploitation of resources from the people under their administration. He also explained that opportunities were created for the people who helped the powerful to build capital. Tilly (1985) war and State formation referred to the European State formation process. Tilly's arguments can be summed up that engaging at war, exploitation of resources and building capital were the basis the European State formation. According to Tilly, the intention of the powerful people who fought wars in Europe was not to form the national State. He explained that the powerful persons were simply engaged in fierce competition of exploiting resources but ended up in forming the State. (Evans, Rueschemeyer, Skocpol, 1985: 172-173).

### **2.2.2 Economies During War**

Cramer (2006: 217) argues that war leads to accumulation of capital and generates market labor. For example, warfare often involves "'asset transfer', or theft and expropriation of land, livestock, and people as laborers". Conflict in developing countries can be interpreted in two dimensions, which are, as a cause or consequence of 'state failure' and conducive environment for economic networking and primitive accumulation.

According to Mark Duffield (2001), war functions as a process of socio-economic restructuring mechanism. It involves opposing societies and complex situation whereby the restructuring of the social, economic, and political change occurs. War also serves as an opportunity for economic gains to those who involve in it (Berdal & Malone, 2000; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). The interconnectedness between war and socio-economic restructuring also comprises empirical relationship between war and income (Murdoch & Sandler, 2002; Berdal & Malone; Collier, 2003). The empirical relationship involves the impact of war to per capita income and economic growth (Blattman & Miguel, 2010).

Another aspect of looking at the economies of war is the cost of war. As war is by its very nature consuming, its cost is quite high. This includes the human cost as well as the economic cost. Different wars produce different numbers of casualties (death and injuries). There are military casualties in war, collateral damage, and resource destruction. The human toll is not limited to casualties; it includes displacements, vulnerabilities, insecurity, and destruction of public and private services.<sup>2</sup> War affects production, distribution, and welfare negatively (Fitzgerald, 1997).

Economies of war is also related to resource mobilization mechanisms during war. The major resources needed for war are generated through exploitation of natural resources such as iron, gold, diamond, timber and diverting humanitarian aid and foreign support. These resources are sold in different black and grey markets. In selling and buying processes are involved different dealers and traffickers as explained in the above sections. Resource mobilization is largely manifested as war economy. There are different types of war economy which are “combat economy, shadow economy and coping economy” (Goodhand, 2004). These three types of war economies can be distinguished according to the main actors who were involved, motivation for war and peace, and their impacts (ibid).

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<sup>2</sup> An example is a field analysis conducted by Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (2018) *Fragile Future: The Human Cost of Conflict in Afghanistan. Humanitarian Action at the Frontlines: Field Analysis Series*

The “combat economy” is linked to the economic activities which are done by “combat commanders”, fighters, and suppliers of arms. According to this categorization, “combat economy” disrupts markets and destructs asset bases. It leads to violent redistribution of resources and entitlements, proliferation of small arms, instability, and emigration (ibid). The “shadow economy” is related to “profiteers, transport sector, businesspersons, drug traffickers, drivers and poppy farmers” as well. “Shadow economy” is about concentrating power and wealth. It undermines “patron-client relationships” and increases vulnerability. Smuggling as part of “shadow economy” circumvents customs duty and sales tax and this negatively affects revenue collection. There is a relationship between the coping economy and poor families. It can reinforce social networks, though it may affect the issue of survival negatively. It also leads to a negative effect on issues of social relationships, health, and education (ibid).

The “Commodity chain analysis” focuses on the main resources in war economies such as diamonds, drugs, and timber. It examines power dynamics within the context of commercial networks. In this context, the power dynamics is about who controls commodities and means of commodity exchange. Similarly, who controls the means of violence is most likely to determine the commodity chain and the distribution of profits. Livelihood analysis provides an investigation of how individuals, households and communities seek to achieve and sustain their livelihoods. It seeks to analyse how the portfolio of a given social group looks like and why it changes over time. It could be due to environmental change, a response to changing market conditions or a short-term response to a direct threat. It deals with the long-term outlook of people, reflects the use and management of assets: savings vs. depleting assets for the sake of immediate survival (Collins, et al, 2003; Ballantine, 2005). Although the “commodity chain” and livelihood analyses can make part of the political economy approach to war, they do not clearly show war as the basis for the emergence of an alternative system.

Many of the contemporary literature focus on the networks of selling and buying weapons during the post-Cold War intra wars in developing countries which is commonly referred as civil wars. However, the networks of selling and buying weapons had their roots in the Cold War era. The Horn of Africa is a good example of the Cold War networks of weapon transfers.

### **2.2.3 Cold War Selling and Buying of Weapons**

During the Cold War era, the selling and buying of weapons helped many governments of the developing countries to advance their military capability (Bell, 1973). In some cases, highly equipped modern military and well-organized military structures were established. Ethiopia under the 'Marxist-Leninist' regime of Mengistu Haile-Mariam was a good example (Bell,1973; Legum and Lee, 1977; Erlich, 1983; M. Makinda,1992). The selling and buying of weapons illegally helped guerrilla forces and different armed factions to be well armed. Some were armed to fight for national liberation, others are fighting in the name of justice, others to fight in the name of religion and others for 'self-defence'.

The selling and buying of weapons have been carried out through two channels. The first channel of weapons transfers is the importation of weapons by the States involved in conflict. States can import arms legally and through grey markets. For example, the databases of research institutes such as SIPRI<sup>3</sup> and Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (Benson, 2005), countries of the horn of Africa were involved in the importation of various weapons from different countries across the world. The second channel of weapons channelling is made through the role played by States such as arming groups against their enemies. For example, arms were flown from different regions to Somalia, Southern Sudan, and Darfur. Many countries, including Eritrea and Ethiopia, channelled weapons to the Sudan People

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<sup>3</sup> According to the report provided by SIPRI, the amount of weapons that were imported by the government of Sudan between 1995 and 2005 was considered as one of the top twenty during the given period. accessed online at: <http://www.sipri.org/contents/armstrad/access.html#twenty>.

Liberation Movement/ Army (SPLM/A), Somali warlords and Islamists; Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Darfur armed groups (U.N. Monitoring Group, 2006).

Both the Cold War and the post-Cold War period demonstrated a greater involvement of several actors in a war. During the Cold War, the main global actors were the U.S.S.R and the U.S.A. On the recipient side, the main clients were States, which the superpowers used to project their agendas. These big and small actors created linkages both at global and regional levels. For example, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan were examples of such client States in the Horn of Africa. Insurgent movements, such as the Eritrean armed movements for Independence, were also part in the larger picture of the regional and global linkages during the Cold War era.

Regional networks were also used to establish bases where various activities were planned and executed. The plans included wars that were waged against governments in neighbouring countries. Several Eritrean armed factions used Sudan as their base during the 30-year EWI. Similarly, the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement/ Army (SPLM/ A) used Ethiopia (Bell, 1973; Legum and Lee, 1977; Erlich, 1983; Makinda, 1992). After Eritrea's independence in 1991, the South Sudan rebels used Eritrea as a base to wage war against the central government of Sudan. The War started in 1983 and ended in 2005. The provision of sanctuary to protagonists reflected the complexity of conflicts in the horn oof Africa.

#### **2.2.4 Post-Cold War Selling and Buying of Weapons**

Amnesty International identifies activities such as selling and buying of weapons that occur during war. The selling and buying of weapons comprise crucial part of war. The selling and buying of weapons include different types of weapons and ammunitions of weapons, extra spare parts that are needed to replace the used and older, materials needed for military construction purposes, and providing with military skills such as military training (Amnesty International, 2006). Selling and buying of weapons can be done in two different ways. One,

that it can be done in a legal way. Two governments can engage in buying and selling weapons legally according to international laws. The process of legal procurement can also involve brokers and weapons manufacturers. Second, that selling and buying of weapons can happen illegally. It can happen in violation of the international laws. This type of weapons trade is considered illegal, and the process is called trafficking. The illegal type of selling and buying of weapons occur in a situation whereby international controlling mechanisms are weak or not available (Jarstad, 2007; Shedd, 2008; Pugh and Cooper, 2004).

In this chapter, three perspectives about the process of selling and buying of weapons in war are identified. The first perspective discusses the effects of the selling and buying of weapons in wars (Pearson, 1994). The second viewpoint is that the effects of selling and buying of weapons during war depends on the purpose of the procurement. It depends if the selling and buying aimed for the purpose of peace making or engaging in violence. However, it can be used to boost strategic military power. The strategic military power can boost military confidence of the side that buys the weapons (Tillema and Kinsella, 1995; Kinsella, 1994). It also discusses the effects of selling and buying of weapons to the economy of the recipients. According to Singh (2006), the procurement of weapons has impact on Human Development Index (HDI) and therefore affects economic growth of a country. He compares several countries to measure the impact of importing weapons to the countries' economies. He presents examples of countries such as Egypt, Eritrea, Namibia, Pakistan, Sudan, and Vietnam. The comparison was made between the money spent by states on weapons purchases and the expenditure on social and economic necessities. According to Singh's findings, countries that spent more money on buying weapons were affected the worst, and their HDI decreased (Singh, 2006: 4).

According to a report by Debbie Hillier from Oxfam GB and Brian Wood from Amnesty International:

The uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of arms by government forces and armed groups takes a massive human toll in lost lives, lost livelihoods, and lost opportunities to escape poverty. An average of US\$22bn a year is spent on arms by countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America – a sum that would otherwise enable those same countries to be on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals of achieving universal primary education (estimated at \$10bn a year) as well as targets for reducing infant and maternal mortality (estimated at \$12bn a year) (Hillier and Wood, 2003).

The third perspective discusses the selling and buying of weapons in an illegal way. The weapons that are sold and bought in illegal ways mostly comprise weapons which are known as small arms. According to the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs,<sup>4</sup> a single weapons sale in an illegal way passes through networks of several persons and institutions. The persons and institutions that are involved in the networks include brokers, banks, transportation companies, and trans-shipment points. In addition, the availability of false end-user certificates enables traffickers and their clients to circumvent UN arms embargoes (Goodhand, 2004: 58-70; Collinson, et al. 2003). According to the UN Review Conference on illegal small weapons trade,<sup>5</sup> there was an estimated \$ 1 billion-a-year illegal trade in small weapons globally. According to Small Arms Survey research this constitutes only 10 % to 20 % of the total trade in small arms. This *illegal* small weapons trade is mainly a phenomenon of post-Cold War period, which has been made available through ‘black and grey markets’<sup>6</sup> of small arms.

Besides the selling and buying of weapons, the post-Cold War era wars also involved several regional and global actors. For example, Somalia experienced fierce civil war during

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State Bureau of Political-Military Affairs: *Arms Transfers and Trafficking in Africa*.

July 9, 2001. Accessed online at: [http://www.defense-aerospace.com/cgi-bin/client/modele.pl?prod=16134&session=dae.25075054.1174510609.D69wz38AAAEAADXf3eUAAAAL&modele=jdc\\_1](http://www.defense-aerospace.com/cgi-bin/client/modele.pl?prod=16134&session=dae.25075054.1174510609.D69wz38AAAEAADXf3eUAAAAL&modele=jdc_1)

<sup>5</sup> UN Review Conference on “Illicit Weapons Trade, Illicit Small Arms Trade in Africa Fuels Conflict, Contributes to Poverty, Stalls development”, Say Speakers on Second Day of UN Review Conference. General Assembly DC/3032; 27 June 2006. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/dc3032.doc.htm>

<sup>6</sup> According to Aaron Karp (1994: 175-189), the terms “black” and “grey” markets are used to describe illegal trade of weapons which has mainly expanded in the post-Cold War period. s



early 1990s. Yet many regional and international actors, such as the U.S.A., were involved in the war. The reason behind the U.S.A.'s involvement in the Somalia civil war was combatting 'global war on terror' (Sisk, 1996; Gilkes and Plaut, 2000; Huband, 2001; Elmi and Barise, 2006; Menkhaus, 2007). Another example of war that occurred during the post-Cold War period was the war in Darfur, Sudan. It started in 2003 and continued for several years. The Darfur war also created a situation whereby several regional and international actors were involved (Balance, 2000; Johnson, 2003; Flint and de Waal, 2005; Mamdani, 2009). Similarly, During the 1990s, post-Cold wars occurred in West Africa, particularly in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Mukenge, 2002; Pugh and Cooper, 2004) and in Afghanistan and in the Balkan states (Pugh and Cooper, 2004; Jarstad, 2007; Shedd, 2008).

This study adds new perspective of the political economy approach to War. The perspective presents the political economy of war in the context of power relationships which unfolds during War. Political economy in this study refers to the production and distribution of power. The process of production and distribution of power manifested itself through power struggle that occurred between various political forces involved in the War. The power struggle determines the nature of power relationships between the political forces. Based on this new perspective, this study has examined the political economy of the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI).

## **2.3 Conclusion**

War is an old phenomenon in human history. The nature and outcome of war has never been the same in different stages of human development. War can be seen as a manifestation of disputes and as an important mechanism to impose a solution. It was categorized as a cause

of economic destruction. War was defined as a mechanism to impose ones' will to an opponent. By its nature war is a violent confrontation between parties. War can be small or large scale. The cost and outcome of war depends on the scale and intensity. Definitions and interpretations of war abound. An up-and-coming approach to better understanding war is the political economy.

The political economy approach to war helps us examine the interplay of politics and economy during war. There is a plethora of works on how the interplay between politics and economy unfolds during war. This involves how war affects a State as a political entity, such as its economic performance and existence as a political entity. Thus, whether there is an existence of a State or not, the political economy approach provides an understanding of how war contributes to socio-economic restructuring of a given society. It also involves understanding economic activities performed during War.

The contemporary political economy approach to war does not show the effects/ contribution of war to the production and distribution of power during war. On this basis, this study examines the political economy of the EWI that took place during the Cold War era.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research methodology applied in this study. It is based on qualitative research regarding the political economy of the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI). Qualitative research utilized in this study helps to understand the political economy aspect of the EWI. It involved examining historical accounts of the EWI. Examining historical accounts of the War involved primary sources such as interviews and written first-hand accounts as well as secondary sources such as books and articles. Through examining the historical accounts, this study focuses on three main objectives of the study. First, it identifies that establishing a political economy approach to the EWI is imperative. Political economy in this study refers to the making and administration of power. The phenomenon of making and administration of power is understood through studying the power struggle unfolded during the EWI. Second, that it focusses on the effects/contribution of the EWI to the power relationships among various Eritrean political forces. Power relationships is identified through examining the power struggle that occurred among various Eritrean armed groups that fought the War during the 30-year War of Independence. Third, that it highlights on how the 30-year War affected the newly formed State of Eritrea.

The three main objectives of this study are presented in three major themes. The first theme is the EWI. It entails the prelude to the EWI, and the historical and social contexts of the fragmentations and factionalism among various factions of the armed groups that occurred

during the 30-year period of armed struggle. The second theme is international involvements and the EWI. The international involvement is presented in two aspects. The first aspect addresses the Western governments', such as the U.S.A, Britain, France, and the U.S.S.R., involvement in hindering Eritrea's right to self-determination. The second aspect is related to the Western governments' military support to the governments and rebels in the horn of Africa during the Cold War era. Both aspects examine the effect of international involvements to the EWI. The third theme is ELF's formation to its implosion. The ELF was the first armed group that started the EWI. The implosion of the ELF marked the emergence of various breakaway armed groups. Among the breakaway groups, the strongest was the EPLF. The EPLF finally won the EWI and established the first government of the newly formed State of Eritrea in 1991.

Qualitative research is appropriate to the study of the political economy of the EWI. In qualitative research, data collection includes experience of persons in a given situation (Stake, 2010). In this regard, the data of concern to this study was experience based historical accounts of veterans of the EWI. Therefore, it was appropriate to use qualitative research in this study. The research methodology utilized in this study is presented in five sections. The first section entails the research paradigm. The second section presents the research approach which entails the strategies of inquiry applied in this study. The third section presents the research design used in this study. It entails data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The fourth section discusses the trustworthiness of the data collected. The fifth section highlights ethical considerations applied in this study.

### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 26), paradigm means a "philosophical way of thinking". A paradigm also means a "set of basic beliefs" that addresses eventuality (Guba and

Lincoln, 1994: 107). Therefore, a research paradigm serves as a “theoretical and philosophical” frame of a research (Kharti, 2020: 1435). In relevance to this study, a research paradigm is a “conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analyzed” (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017: 26). This research sought to examine the EWI through a political economy approach in a context of power relationships. To examine power relationships, understanding the nature of power struggle unfolded during the EWI was imperative. The examination involved inquiring various personal experiences and personal accounts of the Eritrean veterans who participated in the EWI. The EWI has ended in 1991; therefore, the study was to examine a War that ended three decades ago. The data that was collected is accounts of personal experiences of the veterans of the EWI. This study also highlights implications of the power struggle unfolded during the EWI to state formation in Eritrea.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

Research approach is also referred as strategies of inquiry. “Strategies of inquiry are types of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, designs or models that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design” (Creswell, 2009: 11). This study has applied qualitative method of data collection procedure. In qualitative research, multiple sources can be used to collect data. Multiple sources include interviews, observations, and documents (Ibid: 175). The use of multiple ways, for example triangulation, helps develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Denzin and Lincoln, 1993: 5). The collection of data in this study triangulated interviews, written first-hand materials of personal accounts, and secondary sources such as books and articles. Veterans of the EWI who served at different leadership levels and held critical positions during the War period were the primary sources of

information. The reason is that the experiences of these veterans are important as they have in depth knowledge and background information, which is crucial to understand the EWI in the context of the power struggles unfolded during the War period. Therefore, qualitative method is used to interpret their personal accounts and explanations regarding their experiences.

### **3.3 Research Design**

A research design is a plan on how to conduct research. It entails three components “the worldview assumptions the researcher brings to the study; procedures of inquiry (called strategies); and specific methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (Creswell, 2009: 3). These three components of a research design interact in the process of conducting research. To embark on a research plan, a researcher needs to identify worldview assumption which is relevant to the study at hand (Ibid). I applied the critical paradigm, which involves assumptions on power structures and power relationships (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017: 35), because the objective of this study is to examine the contribution of the EWI to power relationships. The second component of a research design is the strategy of inquiry related to the chosen worldview. The strategy of inquiry I applied in this study is qualitative strategies.

Creswell (2009) identifies five strategies of inquiry in qualitative studies. They are, ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research, narrative research. The strategy of inquiry related to the qualitative approach in this study is phenomenological research. Phenomenological research is “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (2009: 13). Phenomenological research as a strategy of inquiry is relevant to the qualitative method I applied in this study. Examining the political economy of the EWI was phenomenological because the personal accounts of the veterans of the EWI was related to the phenomenon of the War. The phenomenon of the War was the power struggle unfolded during the EWI period. It

is explained based on historical accounts of personal experiences. In doing so, the focus was on the contribution of the EWI to power relationships. The method of data collection in this phenomenological research entails “the forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (Creswell, 2009: 15).

Before delving into the forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, I will explain about the population and sampling process I applied in this qualitative research, which focusses on the political economy of the EWI in the context of power relationships phenomenon.

### **3.3.1 Population**

Population is an important aspect in the process of data collection which involves identifying sources that meet the needed criteria and appropriate to a study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 96; Burns and Grove, 2003: 213; Babbie 2002, 109). In this study, population referred to persons who acquire knowledge and information based on own experiences during the EWI. The target population of this study were veterans who participated in the EWI and served at different leadership positions during the War. The rationale behind selecting the veterans of the EWI who served in different leadership positions during the EWI was that their leadership positions did enable them to possess in-depth knowledge of the War and the power struggle unfolded during the War.

I managed to conduct in-depth interviews with 20 Eritrean veterans who participated in the EWI at leadership levels and critical positions. According to Ritchet, Jane and Gillian (2003: 107), in qualitative research more data does not necessarily lead to more information; and those frequencies are not that much important in qualitative research, because one occurrence of piece of data is as useful as many in understanding the question at hand. Analyzing data gathered via interview is labor intensive; therefore, analyzing large data can be impractical (ibid). Another

insight into qualitative research is that small sampling about 15-20 sample size for many qualitative research is considered enough (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006: 18).

### **3.3.2 Sampling**

Sampling refers to the process through which targeted people, organization/s, events, or pieces of data regardless of the size of the population, are included in a study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 77; Burns and Grove, 2003: 31). Sampling is a method of representing and selecting a precise unit of the target population of a study (Casteel and Bridier, 2021: 345). In general, sampling techniques can be either probability or non-probability. The difference between the two is that probability sampling is appropriate for statistical research. Probability sampling involves a random selection of the population, and the probability of selection is clearly identified. However, it is largely inappropriate for qualitative research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 78). Qualitative sampling uses non-probability sampling as a process of selecting the study population. In non-probability sampling, the choice of targeted elements is made deliberately to reflect certain units in the target population (ibid, 78).

This qualitative research employed non-probability sampling technique in selecting the veterans of the EWV. There are several types of non-probability sampling techniques. Some of them are quota sampling, self-selection sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive or judgmental sampling. In quota sampling the selection of participants should be proportional, for example gender wise or other stratifications. In self-selection sampling participants volunteer on their own without the researcher approaching them. Snowball sampling is a chain whereby existing participants recruit others to take part in the study. In purposive or judgmental sampling, the persons, organizations, or settings are deliberately selected aiming to collect important data based on the judgment of the researcher (Casteel and Bridier, 2021: 349 – 350; Sharma, 2017: 752; Etikan I, 2017: 1 – 2; Taherdoost, 2016: 22 – 23). In this study, I used purposive sampling technique to select key participants.



Using non-probability purposive sampling technique meant that all veterans of the EWI did not get equal chance to participate in the study. The selection criterion I applied was participation in the EWI at leadership positions. A leadership position during the war meant to have possessed a first-hand information, for example, regarding crucial events and decisions/resolutions during the given War period. The EWI took place from 1961 to 1991. Most of those who participated in the early years of the War are no longer alive. Those who are alive live in different parts of the World. Some of them are inside Eritrea, while others live as refugees in the Sudan. Some others of them live in exile in Australia, Europe, the U.S., and Canada. Contacting those inside Eritrea was impossible, because telephone communication was, in most cases, under surveillance due to the totalitarian nature of the government in power, and even if the line worked somehow, it was very poor to conduct interviews over the telephone. Therefore, based on non-probability purposive technique, I confined my selection within those who live in Sweden, Germany, U.S., Australia, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan.

### **3.4 Data Collection Process**

In this study, data was collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were divided into two forms. The first was in-depth interviews. The second was personal accounts documented in written formats such as unpublished papers and book-like formats. The secondary sources include books and journals.

#### **3.4.1 Primary and Secondary Sources**

Primary sources are the sources which provide first-hand information of the subject being studied. In other words, primary data are original or first-hand data collected for a specific research problem being studied. Examples of primary sources include interviews (Hox and Boeije, 2005: 593). In doing research about the EWI which ended thirty years ago, a first-hand

or original information about the war could only be obtained from the veterans who participated in the War. This study used interviews as the primary data collection process to examine the power relationships unfolded during the EWI. According to Creswell (2009: 180 – 181), some ways of conducting interviews include in-person/ one-to-one /face-to-face interviews, telephone researcher interviews, focus group researcher interviews, and E-mail internet interviews. Collecting data using interviews allows the researcher to control the line of questioning. Interviews are important in collecting historical accounts such as personal accounts of the veterans of the EWI regarding the phenomenon of power relationships unfolded during the War. In my field research I conducted in-person/ one-to-one /face-to-face interviews, interviews over zoom teleconference application, interviews over Facebook Messenger, and over the phone interviews.

The process of the interviews I conducted involved collecting addresses and telephone numbers of the selected sample. I collected telephone numbers and email addresses from different Eritreans whom I thought they could have the contacts. In this regard, snowballing was helpful. The persons whom I contacted also led me to other persons for additional contact details. Once I collected contact addresses, it was not that difficult to reach most of those whom I listed. I did the explanation based on the prepared UKZN Consent Form. After understanding between me, the researcher, and those who volunteered to participate was reached appointments were set. The interviews were conducted with the veterans of the EWI who live in Sweden, Germany, U.S., Australia, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan. I conducted Field research in Sudan in July 2021 where I conducted face-to-face interviews with several veterans of the EWI. Interviews in Sweden, Germany, U.S.A, Australia, and Saudi Arabia were conducted over the internet communication applications such as zoom teleconference application, Facebook Messenger, and over the phone interviews. Out of twenty-five (25) sample population that I approached, three (3) declined the invitation because of sickness and related personal reasons. Two (2)

changed their minds few days into the appointments. The rest twenty (20) volunteered and participated in the interviews. The interview was conducted single person at a time in separate hours and dates.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic and Tigrinya languages. Interviews were audio recorded and examined thoroughly during analysis by listening to the audio as many times as possible. The interviews have been used to assess the inside knowledge – based on personal experiences – of several veterans of the EWI. In addition, I used personal experiences-based accounts that were written by veterans of the EWI as primary data. Most of the personal experiences-based accounts used in this study are written in Arabic and Tigrinya languages. I speak both languages, therefore, transcribing the materials into English was not a problem.

Secondary sources are second-hand information or data collected earlier by other researchers for other purposes. Secondary data are collected from sources such as archival sources, academic books, and journal articles (Hox and Boeije, 2005: 596). In this regard, written materials about the Eritrean war of independence were given priority. However, written materials about the wars that occurred in different countries in the horn of Africa were also utilized. The secondary sources that were utilized in this study were mainly used to elaborate background explanations and elucidate theoretical explanations presented in the study. They secondary sources were also used to corroborate the information collected through the primary sources explained above. Particularly, they were useful in corroborating dates, names of places where events took place. The EWI took place between 1961 to 1991; therefore, the length of time made it difficult for some of the veterans of the EWI I interviewed to recall everything in precision such as detailed information of dates and places of events. The veterans who wrote their personal experiences-based accounts managed to include dates of events and names of places. Besides, the secondary sources written about the EWI presented details of dates and names of places based on their research findings. However, some of the information that were

presented in some of the secondary sources were disputed by the veterans of the EWI I interviewed. Therefore, combining both my primary and secondary sources was crucial.

The outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic was an impediment. The time when I was supposed to do field research, the world was under covid-19 lock down. The lock down meant movement was restricted and approaching other persons was impossible. Communication was limited only to the phones and via the internet access. Limited movement meant no flexibility for a researcher. It was impossible to meet people in Europe (where I live right now) in person for face-to-face interviews. However, on the other side of it, the covid-19 pandemic lockdown created environment whereby those who had access to the internet were able to have enough time to be available online. Availability was helpful to communicate online. Therefore, interviews were conducted using internet communication applications as explained above. Regarding my field research, my plan to travel to Sudan was also delayed. Because the Sudanese embassy in Stockholm (where I live) did not issue visas due to the covid-19 pandemic. I cancelled my plan to travel to Ethiopia due to same covid-19 pandemic problem and unrest in the country. However, I managed to travel to Sudan in July 2021 for a three-week period after the Sudanese Embassy in Stockholm resumed issuance of visa.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

This study applied interpretive data analysis. In doing interpretive analysis of the collected data can be quite challenging in the beginning. Where to start? What to take and what to leave? Interpretive analysis is to be able to describe "... the characteristics, the processes, transactions, and contexts that constitute the phenomena being studied ...” (Terre Balance, 2006: 321). The description needs to be expressed in the context of the phenomena being studied. The purpose of the description is to put events and phenomena into perspective (ibid).

Therefore, after I have collected the data, I applied a step-by-step process of describing the data for the purpose of putting events and phenomena into perspective.

In this study, the step-by-step process meant first to “immersing oneself and reflecting on the data” (ibid). I listened to the interviews that I conducted with several veterans of the EWI carefully and took notes and summarized the contents. Then reviewed and made inferences. The personal accounts of veterans of the EWI that were presented in unpublished papers and book-like formats were also treated in a similar way to that of the interviews in reviewing, taking notes, and summarizing their contents. The secondary sources were used to corroborate the information collected through interviews and used as references to various events and phenomena.

### **3.6 Trustworthiness**

This study has utilized qualitative research method. As such, it relied on Laura Krefting (1991) assessment of qualitative research trustworthiness strategies. According to this assessment, there are four aspects of trustworthiness which are relevant to both qualitative and quantitative studies. They are: 1) truth value 2) applicability 3) consistency, and 4) neutrality. The purpose of relying on Krefting’s assessment of qualitative research trustworthiness was to help increase the rigor of the qualitative research method that was applied in this study and to enable assess the value of the findings of the study.

According to the assessment mechanism stipulated above, the first aspect of trustworthiness, which is truth value, is related to the experience lived by the informant. The informants selected to be interviewed in this study were all veterans of the EWI. Their information emanated from their personal experiences. However, due to the length of time of the events unfolded during the EWI, accuracy of some information could not be taken at face value. It was appropriate to corroborate the information using written documents such that

personal accounts written by key leaders of the EWI. Personal experiences also reflect credibility of the information collected. Besides, books written based on research were used to corroborated details of dates of events and places of events.

The second aspect of trustworthiness is applicability. In this study, applicability was related to defining each situation as unique. In this study, the uniqueness of a situation is related to three different stages of the EWI. In the first stage, there was one armed organization. It was called the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). In the second stage, a decade later, splinter groups formed a new armed organization. It was called the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). In the third stage, in the mid-1970s, many Eritrean youth joined the armed struggle that enabled the EPLF to grow big and stronger. The EPLF pushed the ELF out of the Eritrean field in 1981 and the EPLF emerged as the dominant armed organization. In 1991, the EPLF defeated the Ethiopian forces in Eritrea and formed a government of an independent Eritrea. Therefore, each stage had its own unique situation whereby different types of power struggle took place. In the first stage, the nature of the power struggle was sectarian in nature. In the second stage, the nature of the power struggle was a clash between the older generation of leadership and younger generation of leadership. In the third stage, the nature of the power struggle was organizational rivalry between the ELF and the EPLF. Therefore, several unique situations in the three different stages were considered and the data collected was comprehensive.

The third aspect of the trustworthiness is consistency. In qualitative research, consistency is more on the uniqueness of the human situation, which is variation in experience rather than identical repetition (Krefting, 1991). As I mentioned above, the main line of separation of the experiences of the veterans was based on the different stages at which each of them participated in the EWI. The three stages I categorized above for the purpose of this study differ from each other. Accordingly, consistency of change in the nature of the power struggle that occurred during the 30-year War period is clearly defined.

The fourth aspect of the trustworthiness is neutrality. Neutrality is the degree to which the findings being free from bias. In qualitative study, neutrality is related to the collected data. One way of being neutral is objectivity of the researcher (ibid). Objectivity implies that the researcher does not influence the finding and nor is he influenced by it. For neutrality to be confirmed, truth value and applicability need to be established as discussed above. Therefore, based on the truth value and applicability related to the information collected from veterans of the EWI, neutrality was also established.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

The research proposal for this study was approved by the Higher Degree Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Once approved, I approached the participants via telephone calls and email messages to seek their permission and consent. In my request, I explained that participation would be voluntary, and consent would be respected. They were also informed that if someone chose to remain anonymous, his choice would be respected. Besides, the participants were asked for their permission to be audio recorded. I explained to the participants that in the finished thesis, quoting and referencing of the sources of information would be according to the agreement. Meaning: those who want to remain anonymous will be mentioned as anonymous. Those who do not have any problem, their full names would be written. Accordingly, only 3 out of 20 participants chose to remain anonymous. The rest agreed that their full names to be cited within texts and listed in the reference list.

The participants were also asked for their agreement regarding data usage. Accordingly, the data that was collected through interviews was stored in mp3 and mp4 audio formats. Then it was downloaded and kept in USB storage to be used any time. The data may be used even more than five years.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the methodological approach applied in this study. It explained the process through which data was collected and analyzed. The data collection process was intensive, and the magnitude of the data was quite large. The research methodology of this study involved research paradigm, which was used as a conceptual lens to examine the problem of the study. It also used qualitative method of data collection procedure. It also explained the research design of this study which involved strategy of inquiry and data collection and data analysis. This study followed the instruction of the ethical considerations strictly according to the UKZN HSSREC.



## **Chapter 4**

### **The Eritrean War of Independence (EWI)**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the first major theme of the study. It can be classified into two categories. The first category discusses the prelude to the War. It attempts to examine the decolonization process in Eritrea. The main argument in the first category examines different aspects of the process of decolonization. An aspect of which examines the paradox of annexing Eritrea into Ethiopia after more than half a century rule under European colonialism. In doing so, it puts the 30-year war of independence as a legitimate response against the annexation. The second category entails arguments which attempt to examine historical and social contexts of the fragmentations and factionalism occurred during the 30-year period of armed struggle. The core issue raised in the second category involves the power struggle unfolded while the armed struggle for Independence continued.

#### **4.1 The Prelude to the War**

Literature regarding the prelude to the Eritrean war of independence focusses on the failure of the decolonization process. In this regard, the interpretation of decolonization refers to “the formal achievement of sovereign statehood by a previously colonized territory” (Colins, 2016: 1). After the end of World War II, many colonized territories in Asia and Africa begun formally achieving sovereign statehood. The process of decolonization was not peaceful and

orderly in many colonized territories. In this study, therefore, failure of decolonization refers to a failure in achieving a sovereign statehood replacing a western rule of colonialism. One of the failed cases of decolonization process was Eritrea.

Italy invaded Eritrea at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In January 1890, Italy declared the territory (Eritrea) as its colony in east Africa. Fifty years later, the British Imperial troops marching from their colony in Sudan defeated the Italians in Eritrea in April 1941; and ruled Eritrea under military administration till 1952. During the decade under the British colonial administration, the process of decolonization or the process towards establishing an independent Eritrea went futile. On 02 December 1950, a United Nations (UN) resolution known as Resolution 390 A (V) provided a decision that federated Eritrea under Ethiopian emperor's rule.<sup>7</sup> The federal arrangement did not last long; Eritrea was officially annexed into Ethiopia on 15 November 1962. Both the federal arrangement and the annexation process constituted to become as part of the complicated decolonization process that went futile during the British Military Administration of the territory.

A perspective sees the annexation of Eritrea into Ethiopia illegal. According to this perspective, the UN resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960 recognized the desire for liberty of all colonized people and an end to colonialism of all forms. In the case of Eritrea, the UN resolution 390 (v) did not dismiss Eritrea's right to self-determination. The provision recognized the Eritrean people as a people in a defined territory and under a legitimate autonomous government. The defined characteristics of the Eritrean people was later emboldened by the continued political and armed struggle claiming the right to self-determination (Fenet, 1988: 34-38).

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<sup>7</sup> UN Documents: A/RES/390 (V). Eritrea: Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea; Report of the Interim Committee of the General Assembly on the Report of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea. General Assembly – Fifth Session, 15 December 1950

The stand of western super-powers by the side of Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie and the geopolitical importance of Eritrea's location played its role in denying Eritreans the right to self-determination. According to this argument, in pursuance of global dominance, the superpowers advanced regional political influence. The regional influence maintained through establishing military presence that would favour their place in the global balance of power. In this context, the geographical location of Eritrea would be significant in the region, East Africa, and the Middle East (Cliffe and Davidson, 1988: 52). A perceived Abyssinian long historical existence in the horn of Africa and the alliance forged during World War II between the British and emperor Haile Selassie in fighting against Italy put Ethiopia a favourable regional ally to the Western superpowers.

A *longue durée* into Ethiopian history takes a central place in pro-Ethiopia literature (Levine, 1974; Rubenson, 1976). Ethiopia was depicted as "great country" survived for centuries. Such line of arguments asserts the rule of Abyssinian kings over Eritrean territory before the Italians colonized the territory. Such narrative relegates the period of Italian colonialism of Eritrea and the political experience Eritreans underwent under an imperial colonial rule to nothing. It mixes a pre-colonial mythical narrative of "greater Ethiopia" – never existed as claimed (for example by Halliday and Molyneux, 1981: 175) – to the global political dynamics. It undermines the colonial legacy that determined the political landscape of the colonized territory (Eritrea). The proponents of such perspective drew assumptions to justify Eritrean case as part of Ethiopian internal political dynamics. A long-held assumption on Ethiopia's socio-political flexibility and continuity plays a pivotal role. As such, the perspective puts centre-periphery shenanigan brought by modernity as the cause of Eritrean problem (Erlich, 1986; Araya, 1990).

The decolonization process in Eritrea can be traced back to the British occupation of the territory that lasted from 1941 to 1952. The Administration was known as the British Military

Authority (BMA). As a Western imperial rule, the BMA was a continuation of Italian colonial rule. The difference was the MBA created environment conducive for Eritreans to involve in political activism around the future of Eritrea. Perspectives on how the Eritrean nationalism was shaped under the BMA put the formation of native political parties at the centre of their arguments.

Before delving into the emergence of political parties during the BMA in Eritrea, it is of crucial importance to briefly highlight Ethiopia's political situation during the given period. Ethiopia was under the rule of emperor Haile Selassie till in 1935 when the Italians invaded the country from their colony in Eritrea. Italy's invasion of Ethiopia forced emperor Haile Selassie to flee the country and took refuge in Britain. The return of emperor Haile Selassie from exile to his throne in Ethiopia took place only in May 1941 after Great Britain inflicted military defeat on Italy in Eritrea and Ethiopia. Haile Selassie was in exile after Italy invaded and took over Ethiopia between 1936 to 1941. He lived in Bath, England (Haber, 1992). Meanwhile, Great Britain had already identified Ethiopia as a co-belligerent against Italy. On 24 June 1940, Haile Selassie received a letter from the British prime minister, Winston Churchill. In the letter Churchill encouraged the emperor to mobilize Ethiopians and stir up revolution against Italian rule. Churchill's letter then followed by a plan of providing Haile Selassie with financial support in his struggle against Italy (Sbacchi, 1979: 26-28).

The British Imperial troops including Ethiopian fighter militias fought the war against Italian troops in Ethiopia and reached Addis Ababa on 5 May 1941, which marked the return of Haile Selassie to his throne (Fontanellaz & Cooper, 2018: 14). The support of the British to Haile Selassie to return to his throne continued in diplomatic and military assistance. Immediately after the return of Haile Selassie, a British Mission known as the British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME) was formed. The BMME helped emperor Haile Selassie establish a nucleus of his new military structure. The BMME trained, armed, and run several infantry

battalions, artillery regiments and related military facilitation for Ethiopia under emperor Haile Selassie (ibid).

On 13 February 1945 Haile Selassie met President Roosevelt of the United States. The meeting took place over a United States warship by the Great Bitter Lakes of Egypt. On a private conversation between Haile Selassie and Roosevelt, they discussed on official business. Haile Selassie raised his country's need for a port. Asked by Roosevelt, Haile Selassie proposed Djibouti as a short-term plan while he expressed his intention to have port in Eritrea as his long-term plan.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to highlight that Haile Selassie's endeavour to incorporate Eritrea begun when he forged good relationship with Great Britain and the US administration during his alliance with the two big powers in defeating Italy. In short, being a client of the Allied powers helped the emperor access international support in his long-term plan of incorporating Eritrea. For the Great Britain and the US, emperor Haile Selassie seemed a preferable client state in East-Africa and the Red Sea region. The preferential treatment by the West played crucial role in resuscitating the prevailed view on the "greatness of Abyssinia". And it played its role in derailing the process of decolonization towards Eritrea's self-determination. The strategy Haile Selassie pursued to acquire access to the Sea was to claim Eritrea. The claim had already - as mentioned above - put Eritrea's future in jeopardy. It involved discussions between Great Britain and the U.S. to handing over the Abyssinian part (highland) of Eritrea to Ethiopia (Negash, 1997: 18). Therefore, by the time political parties emerged in Eritrea in mid-1940s, Haile Selassie had already begun deranging the process of decolonization to his favour.

An argument refutes the claim that the British in discussing with the US would hand over Eritrea's highland to Ethiopia. It argued that the claim "was not based on any formal British declaration but on the texts of various propaganda leaflets which had been scattered from the

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<sup>8</sup> A report by the Minister in Ethiopia (Caldwell) to the Secretary of State. Addis Ababa, February 27, 1945. Foreign Relations, (1945, p. 6), Volume VIII

air during the campaign of 1940-1” (Trevaskis, 1960: 58). Some of the contents of two leaflets are worth re-quoting here:<sup>9</sup>

A first leaflet that was quoted as form of Haile Selassie’s proclamation:

Eritrean people ...! You were separated from your mother Ethiopia and were put under the yoke of the enemy, and under the yoke of the enemy you still remain ... I have to restore the independence of my country, including Eritrea, whose people will henceforth dwell under the shade of the Ethiopian flag ...

A second leaflet that was quoted as prepared by the British intelligence:

Eritrean soldiers, listen! Desert from the Italians and join us! We know the reason you would not fight us was that you did not wish to be ruled by the Italians; you will receive your full reward. You people who wish to live under the flag of His Imperial Majesty and to have your own flag, we give you our word you shall be allowed to choose what government you desire!

By comparing the above quoted contents, the argument goes on to highlight that Ethiopian claim of a promise made by the British to hand over would remain less valid. Haile Selassie’s proclamation leaflet and the leaflet prepared by the British intelligence are not the same. The later calls upon the Eritrean people to have own flag or even would be allowed to choose what government the people of Eritrea would desire. (Trevaskis, 1960: 59).

In a slightly different tune, an explanation puts the cooperation between Haile Selassie and the British favourable to Ethiopia’s claim over Eritrea. In 1940 when Italy and the British were engaged in war, a small British intelligence group led by G.L. Steer communicated with Eritrean soldiers in the Italian army for an end purpose of encouraging them to dissent the colonial army. As a result, thousands of Eritrean soldiers deserted the Italian army between November 1940 and February 1941. In this explanation, the distribution of propaganda leaflets by the side of Haile Selassie was interwoven into the British intelligence call of desertion to the Eritrean soldiers in the Italian army. Out of the several military bulletin of emperor Haile Selassie’s that were dropped between July 1940 and March 1941, two were aimed at Eritrea.

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<sup>9</sup> Both quotes are made by Trevaskis in his book “Eritrea: A Colony in Transition 1941-52” pp. 58 – 59.

Written in Tigrinya, the first pamphlet read “fight for your king and own flag”. The second called Eritreans to “refrain from being tools in the hands of Italians against your motherland Ethiopia”. G.L Steer would describe the Ethiopian campaign as “most impressive”. (Negash, 1997: 18-19).

After the British controlled Eritrea in 1941, the propaganda of “Ethiopian nationalism” was disseminated to dilute the growth of political consciousness of Eritreans towards self-determination. Identity politics lumped into some existed grievances played major role in effecting “Ethiopian nationalism” among some Eritrean quarters. Ethiopia relied extensively on the Coptic Church to arouse support of the Christian segment of the Eritrean people. The Coptic Church had always been the custodian of the Abyssinian tradition; therefore, would be easy to infiltrate. Besides, the Eritrean Coptic Church had grievances against the Italian policy of land dispossession. The claim by the Church was also rejected by the British Administration. (Trevaskis, 1960: 59).<sup>10</sup> The alternative left for the Church was then to turn to its traditional protector, the Abyssinian Church. By 1942, the Church was involved in all its capacity propagating “Ethiopian nationalism” (ibid: 60).

In May 1941, a native association was formed. Two perspectives may be identified regarding the formation of the association. The association was known in Tigrinya language as *Mahber Fikri Hager* (translated into: “Love of Country Association”). A perspective puts the objective of the “Love of Country Association” was uniting Eritrea with Ethiopia (Trevaskis, 1960: 60; Negash, 1997: 19; Ellingson, 1977: 261). A second perspective puts the Association as non-political. Rather it was formed to oppose illegal criminal acts - against natives - committed by some Italians remnants under the British administration. It then managed to form an elderly council served as an advisory committee to the British administration regarding

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<sup>10</sup> Trevaskis (1960, p. 59), explains that the Eritrean Coptic Church possessed extensive land estates, including fertile land of Bahri. “The Italian government had dispossessed the Church of these estates, converted them into Crown land, and then leased them to many of the land-hungry Plateau villages and few Italian settlers.” The British rejected the Church’s petition to return the land.

affairs of the natives. It also managed to form native courts to oversee own issues (Tesfai, 2001: 79-81). The Association lasted from May 1941 to October 1943 (Negash, 1997: 19; Tesfai, 2001: 80). In 1944 the Association split into those who favoured union with Ethiopia and those who opposed union with Ethiopia (Tesfai, 2001: 79-81). Others put the Association simply as a Unionist party right from its outset (Negash, 1997: 19).

The “Love of Country Association” was deeply infiltrated by the sentiment of “Ethiopian nationalism”. Top members of the association were involved in hate monger against not only the Italians and the British, but also against Muslim natives such as the Jeberti. It was part of the identity politics propaganda favouring “Ethiopian nationalism”. The propaganda portrayed Ethiopia as a country where the Abyssinian Christian controlled the politics and the economy. The aim was to comfort the Christian population of Eritrea by convincing them as part of the “greater Ethiopia”. The propaganda had significant influence on many Eritrean Christians and made them stand by the side of Ethiopia (Trevaskis, 1960: 61).

The emergence of political parties during the era of the BMA in Eritrea is also referred to as the “growth of political consciousness”<sup>11</sup> of Eritreans. The growth of political consciousness of Eritreans during the era of British Administration reflected complexities of the decolonisation process in the middle of World War II. The forces involved in the war were the Allied forces on the one hand and the Axis forces on the other. The Axis forces (Italy one of them) were defeated in the war. Eritrea was an Axis (Italian) colonial territory later controlled by an Allied force (the British). Therefore, according to the agreement between the Allied forces, Eritrea was an enemy territory to the British.

An explanation put the British control of Eritrea as “care taking” rather than colonial administration. It compares that while Italy’s control over Eritrea was colonial and designed to remain so indefinitely, the British control was based on international rules that allowed the

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<sup>11</sup> The phrase “growth of political consciousness” was used by Trevaskis in his book “Eritrea: A Colony in Transition 1941 – 52”, p. 46, to explain how political activity of Eritreans developed between 1941-7.



victorious ones govern the occupied enemy [Italy in this case] territories in war time. Due to those international rules the British control over Eritrea was temporary. Not only that but also its further plan depended on the outcome of the war [World War II] and peace treaty that would unfold among the powers at war. There were also the 1907 terms of Hague Convention, which made it impossible for the British to change the existing enemy administrative institutions of a given territory [in this case Eritrea]. The Convention allowed change only for military necessity, humanity, and conscience. Therefore, in the beginning, due to the inconveniences and undesirable situation, the British had little freedom to bring about changes. Yet, the restructuring of the Administration did take place. However, due to the war situation, the British Administration in Eritrea was accountable to the British Military command responsible for the Middle East region. It was transferred to the Foreign Office only in 1949 (Trevaskis, 1960: 24-25; Longrigg, 1945: 149).

The above explanation intends to spare the British Administration from the responsibility of the crisis unfolded in Eritrea during the Administration's control of the territory. The British control over Eritrea brought about lawlessness, hunger, and diseases. At the core of the issue was a policy problem. As in the above explanation, the British Administration saw itself as only a caretaker and was less interested or less capable – due to international treaties – in controlling and changing the crisis. Consequently, it contributed to widening existed socio-cultural and economic cracks among the Eritrean society. To that end, the emergence of political parties not only reflected the pre-existed ills and fragmentations but was also influenced by the British contribution to widening the cracks.

However, according to the British Administration's assessment, the colonial territory that was called Eritrea was not fit to be granted the right to self-determination. The assumption was that keeping the territory of Eritrea as it was under Italian colonial rule would not bring lasting solution to the inhabitants. Therefore, partition of the territory according to geo-

historical and racial proximities had to be made. The western part of the territory, which was historically, ethnically, and geographically close to the Sudan be given to the Sudan. The rest part of the territory – especially the highland – which had close historical, ethnical, and geographical proximity to Ethiopia be given to Ethiopia.

The author of the above-mentioned assumption was Stephen H. Longrigg, who was British Chief Administrator in Eritrea from May 1942 until November 1944 (Longrigg, 1945: 149). He saw Eritrea of his days as doomed. Therefore, he suggested dismemberment of Eritrea in some forms and to some extent as alternative (ibid: 172). He summarized his conclusion as follows:

... a partition of the territory should be made. Muslim tribal areas adjoining the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan should be included in the country. The central Christian highlands of Eritrea, with the port of Massawa and the Samhar and the Saho tribes, should form part of a United Tigrai state or province, which should be placed under the sovereignty of the Emperor of Ethiopia but be administered, in his name, by a European power for either a stated or an unstated term of years. The Dankali country with Assab should be assigned unconditionally to the Emperor. Eritrea would cease to exist. (Longrigg, 1945: 174-175).

The above quoted conclusion was based on three assumptions. The first was that the interest of the inhabitants had to be given priority. The second was that the interest would be “security, tranquillity, and the possibility of progress”. The third was that there would not be any reason to hold onto the “artificial unit of Eritrea after a mere half a century of existence” if partitioning the territory based on racial and geographical links bring about solution (ibid: 171).

Another argument underlined that “the idea of restructuring the colonial boundaries was widely discussed in the corridors of powers even before the war against Italy was won” (Negash, 1997: 17). In 1942 there were two alternatives on the table when it came to the restructuring of the colonial boundaries. The first was to hand back the Tigray province [which was administered under Italian Eritrea from 1936 – 1941] to Ethiopia. The second was to

establish a Greater Somalia. And that the future of Eritrea was brought into serious discussion only in 1943 (ibid: 17).

From the outset the process of decolonisation in Eritrea was challenged by several impediments. An impediment was the defeat of the Axis forces before the peace agreement between the Allied and Axis forces. The defeat led to a situation whereby Eritrea became an enemy territory under British occupation and its future fate disputed as discussed above. Another impediment was the interest of Ethiopia in getting access to the red sea and it derailed the decolonization process in Eritrea. The Western powers had shown their support to Ethiopia's interest based on historical and cultural narratives that favoured Ethiopia. That support would encourage Ethiopia to intervene in the decolonization process in Eritrea. A lack of institutional capability to bring different interests of all Eritrean Societies under a cohesive national issue was also one of the impediments to the process of decolonisation. The different interests of the Eritrean societies interwoven with religion, historical and geographical affiliations complicated the process of decolonisation. Last, but not least, the absence of a neutral international agency deals with the process of decolonisation also contributed to the problem (Iyob, 1995: 61).

Therefore, the emergence of political parties in Eritrea was shaped by both local and external factors. In this regard, available literature has dealt with how the internal and external factors influenced the emerged political parties. At the beginning of the political process towards the emergence of political parties, urban and rural unrest occurred in Eritrea. An argument puts the occurrences as a form of transition from the Italian colonial administration to the British "care-taking" administration (Trevaskis, 1960: 47). In this regard, during the transitional period, the BMA provided with opportunities that enabled the Eritreans to acquire knowledge through education and get access to information on various issues and they were

able to publish Newspapers in local languages. Therefore, the transitional period was referred as the era of political consciousness among the Eritreans (ibid).

However, the “political consciousness” under the afore mentioned transition involved economic crisis. At the core of the crisis was growing rate of unemployment among Eritreans that was caused by lack of required skills to satisfy the given market. Employment opportunities were given to Italians who were skilled and met the requirements. In addition to the high levels of unemployment situation, the cost of living had also increased six folds from the 1940 figure to the 1944 (ibid).

In Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, the bitterness of life caused by the economic crisis provoked the Eritreans to resort to violence targeting Italians. The reason behind targeting Italians was that the Italians became unbearable economic competitors. They snatched all economic opportunities and left nothing to the native population except low wage employment. The resentment also led to targeting whoever made riches in the market competition. It included traders -foreigners and natives alike - most of them Muslims. The foreigners included Sudanese who arrived in Eritrea to work in some of the British military enterprises. The disadvantaged of the market competition were mostly Christians. The unrest in Asmara also affected the rural areas (Ibid: 49-51).

Based on the above argument, it can be inferred that the economic unrest and the conflict that arose would impact the development of the “political consciousness” of the Eritreans during early 1940s. Not only that, but also created conducive environment for Ethiopia to intervene. For the BMA, Ethiopia’s claim over Eritrea was right. As it is mentioned in the paragraphs above, the British had proposed that the partition of Eritrea – western part to join Sudan while the rest annexed with Ethiopia - could be a solution to the problem. The partition of Eritrea had also been formally proposed by the British in the meetings of the then super-power countries in 1945 and 1946 (Ibid: 70).

The Eritreans were divided on their decisions regarding the future of Eritrea. The Eritreans who supported the idea of uniting with Ethiopia were mobilised under a political party that was known as the Unionist Party (UP). The Eritreans who opposed the union with Ethiopia. A prominent party that opposed union with Ethiopia was a political organisation known as *Al RabiTa Al Islamiya Al Eritrea* (translated: The Eritrean Muslim League (ML)). Composed of Muslims, the ML was formed in late 1946. (Tesfai, 2001: 187-189). The emergence of the ML had been linked to an incident whereby notable Eritreans – predominantly Christians and some Muslims – gathered in Asmara at a place referred as Bet-Giorghis on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1946 aiming to find solution to the prevailed crisis. In the meeting, disagreement arose when the Muslim elites asked for the meeting to be extended because Muslim attendance was insignificant in number and did not represent all Muslims of the territory. However, they – the Muslims - were attacked in disregard and humiliation by some of the Unionist party fellows. The Muslims had to walkout the meeting and embark on their own way to form a nationalist political party. They then formed the Muslim League and was officially inaugurated in Keren – western Eritrea - on 20 – 21 January 1947 (Tesfai, 2001: 186-189).

The British saw the Muslims were too occupied with internal tribal feud before 1946. The *Bani-Amar* tribe of Barka lowlands had been involved in a bitter conflict with the *Hadandawa* tribe of the neighbouring Sudan over grazing lands and camel theft. The Bani-Amer was also involved in similar conflict with the Nilotic tribes in the Gash-Setit areas. There were tensions between the clans and their traditional ruling class – known as the *Naiibs* - of the Red Sea coastal areas of the Samhar region. In the Sahel and Senhit regions, uprising of the oppressed tribes against their traditional masters - known as *shumaggele* - was rife. The oppressed clans were known as *Tigre* (serfs), while the traditional masters were known as *Shumaggele*. The uprising of the serfs against their traditional masters in the Sahel and Senhit regions had been contextualized as a struggle of emancipation. The British Administration was

convinced that the quest of the serfs' emancipation struggle from the Shackles of the *Shumaggele* aristocrats needed to be solved. To that end they had been engaged in a kind of urgent administrative reform project (Trevaskis, 1960: 70-73).

The worry of the British administration was the fragmented nature of the Tigre tribes. Heads of Tigre families – some of them comprising as small as 20 to 30 individuals - aspired to become autonomous political units. The aspiration of small tribal groups to be recognized as a separate political unit was not accepted by the British administration. The solution then had to be sought with help from prominent figures of the tribes of concern. In 1947, based on the results of extensive meetings and consultations, the structure of the tribal units had to be reorganised so that to serve the emancipation of the Serfs (*Tigre*) from the aristocrats (*Shumaggele*) aristocratic subjugation. It created environment whereby new elect Tigre chiefs stood high equally to those traditional masters. Tribes in different parts of the territory that were in similar serf vs master power relationships were too affected by the reform. All of those who suffered under traditional masters stood by the newly elected Tigre chiefs. Therefore, power confrontation between the two power pillars – Tigre chiefs and the traditional masters – was rife. It then merged into the overall politics of deciding Eritrean future. The *Shumaggele* looked towards the unionist on assumption that the Ethiopian emperor will be on their side. The Tigre chiefs saw union with Ethiopia dangerous as it could jeopardize their emancipation; therefore, opted to empower the nationalists who sought self-determination (Trevaskis, 1960: 72-73).

To that end, prominent leaders of the Tigre chiefs were among the founding members of the ML. The ML members and supporters were Muslims from the western and eastern lowlands and the highlands of Eritrea. It opposed British proposal of partitioning Eritrea. It also opposed union with Ethiopia. It also proposed a transitional Trusteeship under the British or the UN might be considered till full independence had been achieved. The ML advocated for Eritrea's independence (Tesfai, 2001: 198-199).

Although the UP and the ML were the two pioneer political parties that had significant influence on the process of deciding the future of Eritrea, there were also many other political parties that emerged during the development of “political consciousness” among Eritreans. Splinter from the ML would emerge in western lowlands and eastern lowlands later in 1947. In August 1947, a political party called the New Eritrea Pro-Italian Party was formed. On February 18, 1948, *Mahber Nexanetn Ebyetin Eritrea niEritrawyan* (Translated: Association of Independence and Progress: Eritrea for Eritreans) was formed. It was also called Liberal Progressive Party. The Progressive Party had a common goal that was calling for Eritrea’s independence (Tesfai, 2001: 224; Iyob, 1995: 70-71).

From the above explanations about the emergence of political parties during the given period, it can be inferred that the prelude to the Eritrean war of independence was multifaceted. An important aspect of the prelude was interference of Ethiopia’s claim over Eritrea. The claim gained impetus through the British proposal of partitioning Eritrea and the emergence of unionist political party because both would favour Ethiopia’s access to the Sea outlet. The British occupier took Eritrea as “enemy territory” and assumed itself as “care-taker”. The British Administration portrayed Eritrea as unfit to self-rule; therefore, proposed partition of the territory in favour of Ethiopia’s ambition of having access to the Sea. On the other hand, the fragmentation of the Eritrean elites on their political stands regarding Eritrea’s future contributed to complicate the situation. The major divide manifested through the political parties was independence versus union with Ethiopia. As is explained in detail in the preceding chapter, the fate of Eritrea was, then, handed over to the United Nations (UN) and it was the end of the political parties in Eritrea. The UN decided to federate Eritrea under the reign of Ethiopia’s emperor. Few years into the Federal Administration, Ethiopia embarked on eroding the Federal arrangement that led to discontent and anger among Eritreans.

The next section deals with the existing second approach to the Eritrean war of independence, which I classified as a second category. It involves internal power struggle unfolded during the EWI. There is not that much research done regarding the internal power struggle during the EWI. Thus far the area is still up-and-coming. Overall, it is relevant to the study at hand. In the next section I will discuss some of the important aspects of the internal power struggle as per the existing literature.

## **4.2 Internal Power Struggle during the War of Independence**

The main argument presented in the existing literature regarding internal power struggle deals with the impact of the subsumption of religious, ethnic, and class divide into the political development that had been manifested since the BMA over Eritrea (Markakis, 1987: 104). In other words, the social and historical background of the political development among Eritreans had its impact on the internal power struggle during the EWI struggle (Pool, 2001: 33-35).

The EWI was preceded by a ‘peaceful’ political resistance in the 1950s. During the peaceful resistance, Eritreans, somehow, endeavoured to surpass the socio-historical shenanigan that had become entangled in the political developments. The ‘peaceful’ political resistance during the 1950s involved resistances by students and workers that aimed to prevent Eritrea’s annexation to Ethiopia. The resistances took in the form of demonstrations and riots in main Eritrea towns, particularly in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea.

Therefore, the first part of this section briefly discusses the existing literature regarding the power dynamics of the peaceful resistance and how it was linked to the armed struggle. Then the discussion will delve into the armed resistance – the actual war – and will discuss the existing literature that deals with internal power struggle during the war period.



### 4.3 The Peaceful Resistance

The resistance against Eritrea's annexation to Ethiopia had begun in the 1950s. Several peaceful and violent demonstrations took place in Asmara and other towns of the country such as Massawa and Keren. The political resistance was not limited inside Eritrea, but also expanded across borders in neighbouring countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia. Existing literature discusses a clandestine political organisation that was formed in Port-Sudan, Sudan in late 1950s; and spread its networks inside Eritrea. The organisation was called the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM). Existing literature regarding the ELM deal with its formation and development. All agree that the ELM was secular and socialist-oriented nationalist Movement that launched a peaceful political resistance against Ethiopia's encroachment to annex Eritrea.

A perspective on the ELM's formation was that although the organisation enjoyed wide popularity among Eritreans, the founding leaders had no background link to the previous politics of Eritrea. Those who founded the ELM were Eritrean students in Sudan. They were influenced by two developments. The first development was the growth of Sudanese nationalism and the Sudan independence in 1956. The second was that the students, during their visit to Eritrea, witnessed Ethiopia's violation of the Federal arrangement and the growing political discontent among Eritreans (Markakis, 1987: 104-106; Iyob, 1995: 99-100; Pool, 2001: 36; Kebreab, 2008: 149-150).

In similar explanation, the founding leaders of the ELM were of Muslim background with nationalist and secular orientation. They lived in Sudan and were influenced by the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP). The organisational structure of the ELM was divided into clandestine cells each composed of seven members. The members of the organisation included both Muslims and Christians. The initial strategy of the ELM was peaceful struggle (Pool, 2001: 36-37).

Another explanation relates the formation of the ELM to a ban of civil organisations, such as trade unions, following a general strike that unfolded in March 1958 in Asmara. Because of the ban, labour activists went underground and formed the ELM. The ELM operated throughout Eritrea and was known as *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea* in Arabic and *Minkisikas Harnet Ertra* in Tigrinya. The structure in all corners of Eritrea was organised by the founding members who resided in Port-Sudan. The ELM was later called *Mahber shewate* in Tigrinya (translated: Group of seven). However, the name “Group of Seven” was given by Ethiopian security forces after they found information about the organisation’s clandestine cell membership structure composed of seven-members. The organisation was secular in its orientation and was composed of members who hailed from different religious and socio-class background (Kibreab, 2008: 149-150).

The ELM has also been defined as a socialist-oriented nationalist organisation (Killion, 1998: 1995). The secular and socialist character of the ELM reflected the political orientation of its “founding members” (Killion 1998: 195; Iyob, 1995: 98).<sup>12</sup> The key leader of the ELM, Mohammedsaid Nawud, as is explained in chapter six, had been a member of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) from 1951. Being a member of a “Communist Party”, moulded his political thinking and fellow Eritreans towards secular and socialist orientation. In 1956, Mohammedsaid Nawud considered launching an Eritrean underground movement. To that end, in 1957 he approached a prominent Eritrean political figure of the 1940s, Ibrahim Sultan Ali, who did not agree with Nawud’s idea. In early 1958, Nawud approached the SCP in search for support, but was rejected. Beginning in April 1958 Nawud and other six likeminded Eritreans started working on their own to launch the organisation. In November 1958 they launched the underground movement, the ELM (Killion, 1998: 1995).

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<sup>12</sup> The leading founding members who launched the organisation from Port-Sudan were Mahmoud Said Nawd, Saleh Ahmed Iyay, Saleh Aqedda, Mohammed Al Hassan, Said Saber, and several other Eritrean workers who resided in Port-Sudan

Internal power dynamics of the ELM has not been clearly explained in the existing literature. The focus has been on the formation, the goal, membership structure, and the end of the ELM. As briefly explained above, the reasons that triggered the formation of the ELM are put in two forms of situational background. The first was the influence of socialist-oriented nationalism in Sudan. (Markakis, 1987: 104-106; Iyob, 1995: 98; Killion, 1998: 195). The second was the growing trade unions protests and demonstrations in Asmara and other towns of Eritrea (Iyob, 1995: 98). However, it cannot be denied that the ELM was a political continuation of the pro-independence political parties of the 1940s. The struggle for Eritrea's independence had its roots in the British era "development of political consciousness". The political consciousness also engulfed Eritreans who resided outside the country. Therefore, the difference between the 1940s pro-independence political parties and the ELM was structural. The pro-independence political parties of the 1940s were formed inside Eritrea under the western colonial shackles and internal social, religious, and class tensions. The ELM leading figures who resided in Sudan and their political orientation had been influenced by the Sudanese politics of nationalism and spirit of independence of Sudan.

Power dynamics of the ELM is related to the organisation's final years when it was confronted with the emergence and growth of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) starting in 1960. The conflict between the ELM and the ELF has been explained in two perspectives. A perspective put the conflict as power struggle between the older generation and the emerging youth generation (Markakis, 1987: 107). As stated above, the initiative to form the ELM was rejected by the leading patriot politician, Ibrahim Sultan Ali (Killion, 1998: 195). In 1959, the ELM attempted to approach the patriots of the 1940 – who by then were exiled in Cairo – by sending a delegate called Tahir Ibrahim but was not welcomed either. The ELM attempted again to approach the patriots in Cairo in 1960. It was rejected again; this time, among the patriots, was the former president of the Eritrean Assembly under the Federal arrangement, called Idris

Mohammed Adam. The reason was because Idris Mohammed Adam and fellow patriots were busy forming the ELF (Markakis, 1987: 107).

The second perspective put the difference between the ELM and the ELF as ideological. While the founding members of the ELF had direct link to the patriots of the 1940s, the ELM's link was political for being a continuation of pro-independence struggle. The ELM became a challenge to the traditional patronage politics and inter-elite alliances. It transcended religion and ethnic affinities through attempting to pave a way for secular and inclusive political structure (Markakis, 1987: 106; Iyob, 1995: 100). The ELF accused the ELM leaders of being 'communists' and, therefore, anti-Muslims (Killion, 1998: 196). The ELF was not comfortable with ELM's peaceful and underground resistance and saw the organisation suspiciously and perhaps as an Ethiopian agent (ibid).

As is discussed in detail in chapters 5 and 6, the official launch of the Eritrean armed struggle was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1961. The pioneer patriot who shot the first bullet was Hamid Idris Awate. The place where the first bullet fired was in western lowlands of Eritrea. The process of launching the armed struggle took place under the guidance of the ELF. The armed struggle then became a military wing of the ELF. The ELF was established by a group of Eritrean students in Cairo in 1960. Patriots of the 1940s and 1950s such as Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adam were part of the formation process of the ELF, while Woldeab Woldemariam joined the ELM (Markakis, 1987: 109; Killion, 1998: 186). Both the ELM and the ELF were pro-independence organization. The initiative to launch the struggle took place outside Eritrea. The ELM being in Port-Sudan, while the ELF was in Cairo (ibid).

The conflict between the ELM and the ELF worsened and escalated to open war of words. During the escalation of animosity, Ethiopian intelligence operatives found out about the ELM's underground networks. In 1961, the Ethiopian authority arrested several leaders of the ELM, and the clandestine cells were dismantled (Markakis, 1987: 108). The ELM then

suffered defections of its members to the ELF in 1962 (Killion, 1998: 196). The ELM, then, embarked on transforming its peaceful resistance to an armed resistance. In the beginning of 1962, the ELM recruited about thirty Eritreans who were in a police service under the Ethiopian authority in Eritrea. They fled with their weapons from their base at Massawa to wage war against Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea. However, the Ethiopian authority forces were quick to trap their movement and all of them were killed (Markakis, 1987: 108-109; Kibreab, 2008: 151).

Although its first armed team of thirty was trapped and destroyed by the Ethiopian forces, the ELM did not give up on transforming its peaceful resistance to armed resistance. Meanwhile, the animosity between the ELM and the ELF continued. In 1965, the ELM dispatched a fifty-member guerrilla team. However, this time around, it was the ELF forces that surrounded and disarmed the ELM. Thereafter, the ELM could not survive. Most of its leaders joined the ELF; and, structurally, the ELM disappeared as an armed organisation (Ammar, 1992: 51-52; Killion, 1998: 196).

#### **4.4 The Armed Resistance**

The armed resistance referred here relates to the actual War of Eritrea's Independence that lasted for thirty years. Power dynamics deals with the infighting that occurred during the given war period. Existing literature explain little when it comes to power dynamics during the armed resistance. However, there are some important events often discussed. I will divide the events into three. First, the separation of a field command and a political leadership in exile. Second, reformist movements and the split of the pioneer organization, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Third, the splinter groups and what followed thereafter.

## **4.5 The separation of field command and political leadership in exile**

The political wing of the ELF was formed in July 1960 in Cairo, Egypt. The composition of the founding members included Eritrean students in Cairo and veteran political leaders, who were part of the 1940s and 1950s Eritrean politics (Markakis, 1987: 109-110). After they decided to wage an armed struggle, they met inside Eritrea and convinced a prominent Eritrean who served under the Italian colonial army in Eritrea. His name was Hamid Idris Awate. Besides his service under the Italians, Awate was well experienced leader and skilled in military tactics. The ELF leadership entrusted Awate to launch the Eritrean armed struggle. Awate started the armed fight on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1961 in the western lowlands of Eritrea (Gebre-Medhin, 1989: 173).

Although the armed struggle was waged inside Eritrea – which was known as “the field” - and continued its military operations there, the political leadership that was formed in exile remained in exile. Under the command of Hamid Idris Awate and devoted organizers - from the Eritrean lowlands – managed to recruit very few people to join the armed organization. The recruited included Eritrean members of the Sudan Military Forces (SMF). Gradually, the number of newly recruited fighters increased.<sup>13</sup> Simultaneously, the political leadership in exile, which named itself Supreme Council (SC), aware of the remoteness of distance from the field, decided to establish a third body that would be closer to the field and serve as a middle communicator between the FC and the SC. The new body was then named Revolutionary Command (RC). The RC was stationed in Kassala, Sudan, closer to the Eritrean border (Markakis, 1987: 114).

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<sup>13</sup> The launch of the armed struggle, the armed organization, the recruitment, and the phases of formation of the liberation factions is discussed and analysed widely in the next chapters.

Such leadership divide created operational inconvenience. Existing literature identified two reasons for why such inconvenience occurred. First was tribal based personal power struggle. Second was conflict between traditional political leaders. The personal power struggle within the SC deals with the self-appointed executive of the SC. It was composed mainly of three leaders. They were 1) Idris Mohammed Adam 2) Idris Osman Glawdeous 3) Osman Saleh Sabbe (ibid). These three prominent leaders were revered for their contribution to the struggle, while at the same time they were accused of being the reason behind the dysfunctional leadership of the ELF. The three SC leaders originated from different geographical parts and tribal background. Idris Mohammed Adam originated from the province called Barka in western lowlands and was from the Beni Aamer tribe. Idris Osman Glawdeous originated from the province of Senhit in central lowlands, and from the tribes of Betjuk. Osman Saleh Sabbe originated from the province of Semhar in eastern lowlands, and from the tribes of Asaorta and Tigre. Therefore, the argument goes that the friction of power struggle between the three leaders took a form of tribal and regional divide. Each one of them tried to form power base in the field based on their tribal and regional intimacy. However, the regional and tribal cleavages contributed to the fall out of the leadership (ibd).<sup>14</sup>

The situation in the field had started to develop its own problems. The increase in number and the diversification in demography challenged decisions of the leadership in exile. The situation in the Field produced a reform movement, which raised questions regarding frictions and tensions in the organization and the Zonal division of the Army. The Army in the Field was divided into five Administrative Zones in 1965. The reform movement called for a unification of all the five Zones. The call disregarded the leadership of both the SC and the RC. There are three major events mentioned in existing literature.

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<sup>14</sup> This issue is examined in detail in chapters 6 and 7

According to Markakis (1987: 124-125); Iyob (1995: 114); Killion (1998: 41, 45: 81); Gaim (2008: 159-161) the three major events are:

First, that a meeting conducted in a place called Aredayib in western lowlands of Eritrea on 16 June 1968. The meeting was first of its nature where reformists emerged in the field to discuss solutions of the problems they perceived. Attended in the meeting were the commanders of the five Zones and their respective political commissars. Two of the main issues raised were: first, that the problem of the Zonal system and called for its abolition. Second, that the division between the military leadership in the Field and the leadership in exile and called for a “Unified Leadership in the Field instead”. The meeting was concluded by calling for a second meeting to further discuss the issues and take decisions.

Second, that the second meeting, which is known as the Anseba meeting was conducted on 19 September 1968. Although the meeting was a continuation of the Aredayib meeting, attended in the meeting were representatives of only three Zones (Zone Three, Zone Four, and Zone Five). In the meeting, they decided to unite the three zones under one command. The unification was then referred to as a “Tripartite Unity Force”. At the end of the meeting, they set up a committee of twelve composed of the commanders, their deputies, political commissars, and commanders of the training units of the three units. However, since it was important to bring the remaining two Zones (Zone First and Zone Second) to the unity, a third comprehensive meeting was scheduled to take place few months later.

Third, that the third meeting was a large one and referred as a congress. It was conducted at a place called Adobha from 10 - 25 August 1969. About 160 delegates from all five zones attended the meeting. The main issue of the meeting dealt with reform as stipulated in the previous two meetings. They elected a 38-member new leadership mandated till a first General Congress of the organization to be held in one year. The newly established temporary body was called “Provisional General Command (PGC)”. The meeting also decided to abolish the



Revolutionary Council (RC), which was formed to serve as a middle ground leadership between the Supreme Council (SC) and the Field Command (FC). The SC was to continue until the planned congress. However, the SC was asked to submit to the PGC all collected funds and finances.

The three major events mentioned above are discussed in existing literature as reflections of multifaceted problems that unfolded due to lack of consolidated leadership. The lack of consolidated leadership was exposed and challenged by the reform movement that occurred within the ELF. It is, therefore, important to further assess what the existing literature discuss regarding the impact of the reformist movement on the ELF leadership.

#### **4.6 The Reformist Movement within the ELF**

Existing literature do not delve into detailed elaboration on who the reformists were and what exactly triggered the movement. However, the general understanding is that the reformist movement occurred when younger generation – mostly from student background – and of different cultural/religious background joined the armed organization (the ELF) in the second half of 1960s. Prior to the arrival of the younger generation, the ELF members were mostly of the older generation who belonged to the 1940s school of thought in the Eritrean political arena. Besides, the fighters in the field were dominantly from the lowland and Muslims. While the younger generation were, mostly, products of the post WW II Cold War socialist vs liberal Cold War political arena (Markakis, 1987; Iyob, 1995; Kibreab, 2008). Although such a difference has not been explored comprehensively, some literature has discussed important aspects of the phenomenon.

In July 1967, the leaders of the SC (Idris Mohamed Adam, Idris Osman Galawdeous, and Osman Saleh Sabbe) increased the number of the SC to seven. One of which was Tedla

Bairu, a Christian. Tedla Bairu was a leader from the 1940s Eritrean political arena. He was a Unionist Party leader and the first President of the Eritrean government during the federal arrangement with Ethiopia during early 1950s. However, the three key leaders continued to dominate the leadership, as examined in chapters 5 and 6. Besides, the SC key leadership sent several men from the younger generation for training in different countries. In 1967, they SC sent five fighters to China for six months training, which followed by 28 more as a second batch of trainee. Similarly, others were sent to Cuba. (Markakis, 1987: 123). There were also several others who were sent to Syria for military training as early as 1963/1964 as is presented in chapters six and seven.

Above mentioned literature (Markakis, 1987; Iyob, 1995) raised that there was critical demand made by the SC leadership by the mid-1960s that was to stop recruiting new members. The reason would be fear that Ethiopian agents could infiltrate camouflaged as new members. Existing literature do not discuss comprehensively the issue of fear of Ethiopian agents and the impact it had on the effort to unite the five zones under one command. However, there are some critical aspects raised. The worry of the older generation was that the new members could have come from pro Ethiopian background, therefore, pose threat to the struggle. Such an issue would make things more complicated mainly when it comes to demographic diversity. During the emergence of the younger generation – as witnessed in the 1968 meetings – many Christians started to join the armed struggle. The concern raised about infiltration put many Christians on target (Markakis, 1987; Iyob, 1995; Kibreab, 2008). It can be inferred that it was a critical juncture at which the Christian fighters felt isolated and targeted. Therefore, the tension between the older generation and the younger generation got compounded.

In this regard, two important occurrences are identified and will be discussed further in chapters six and seven. The first occurrence was the formation of new transitional leadership known as in Arabic “*Kiyada al Aamma*” (translated: General Command (GC)) – in the Adobha

congress that was held from 10 to 25 August 1969 – representing the five Zonal divisions. The transitional leadership was elected until a First general congress that was planned to be held within a year. The elected leadership was composed of 38 members in which many were from the younger generation who were trained in Syria, China, and Iraq. The second occurrence was the fragmented nature of the congress due to discontent of some of the previous Zone leaders for being excluded from leadership positions and replaced by lower officers (Markakis, 1987: 125). The GC and the SC were in conflict. A critical reason seemed the demand made by the GC that the SC handover the finance and other materials raised through fundraising. It was obviously a move to gradually unseat the SC. There were also disgruntled individuals and groups appeared during the Adobha congress. Besides, there was also discontent among the Christian members who felt discriminated and were targeted by the leadership. Therefore, the tendency to forming splinter groups grew faster.

#### **4.7 The Splinter Groups**

The Aftermath of the Adobha congress led to the split of the ELF into several organizations. The mother organization would remain the ELF. In existing literature, the focus has been on two factions. The main splinter faction was known as Popular Liberation Front (PLF). The faction was composed of several small groups (Iyob, 1995: 114). Most of the groups gathered in Sudan. Then some of them had to sail by boat on the Sea to reach south-eastern Eritrea. Some others took flight to Yemen then back to Eritrea via the Red Sea on boats. Osman Saleh Sabbe played a key role in arranging and facilitating the transportation via Yemen. The destination where some of the groups gathered was south-eastern Eritrea called SodoH-Eila in Dankalia (Markakis, 1987: 126). This study the splinter events in detail in the discussion chapters (chapters six and seven).

In February 1972, the ELF - not happy with the separate existence of the PLF factions - waged a war to liquidate them. The war marked the beginning of civil war of the Eritrean Armed Groups. The civil war brought the PLF factions together simply because they faced a common threat of being liquidated. They consolidated their forces that gradually led them to forming a unified organization. The process of unification continued till the organization conducted its first congress in 1977 and elected its leadership. The newly formed organization was called the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The EPLF liberated Eritrea in 1991 (Iyob, 1995: 116).

Existing literature do not engage the EWI through political economy approach. As such the perspective presented in this study adds new approach to studying the EWI. The political Economy approach to the Eritrean war of independence opens new area for academic debate by presenting issues of power relationships that unfolded during the War.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

There is plethora of literature on the prelude to the Eritrean war of independence. There is also plethora of literature on the Eritrean war of independence. However, few discuss issues regarding fragmentations and power struggle during the Eritrean war of independence. The literature raises issues related to leadership failure of the ELF. The problems of the Zonal system introduced as administrative method where the armed forces were divided into five geographical military commands. The issues of tribal and regional sectarianism are also discussed. The disintegration of the ELF due to internal crisis are also highlighted. However, how the war period production and distribution of power affects power relationships among various political forces are not examined.

## **Chapter 5**

### **International Involvements and the Eritrean War of Independence**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the second major theme of the study. It links the Cold War era international involvements to the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI). The international involvements are explained in the context of interferences in the Horn of Africa. The horn of Africa is a complex region with linked conflict history. The EWI was the major war in its magnitude, intensity, and length fought in the region. Some other wars include wars in South Sudan that occurred between 1955 and 1972 and again between 1983 and 2005. Wars between Ethiopia and Somalia occurred during the 1960s and the 1970s. The chapter examines international involvement in the decolonization process in Eritrea, and the intensity of weapons channeling during the Cold War in the Horn of Africa that linked international involvement to the EWI. This chapter treats the EWI as part of the Horn of Africa that was at the receiving end of arms supplied by the then superpower countries – the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) - and others such as Israel and some Middle Eastern countries.

The USA channeled weapons to the government of Ethiopia during the Cold War period. The weapons were channeled during early 1950s and continued until early 1970s (Spencer, 1977: 22-23; Ayoob, 1978: 10-11; Ottaway, 1982: 26-28). On a similar manner, the USSR channeled weapons to the governments of Somalia and the Sudan during the Cold War

period. The weapons were channeled during late 1960s and 1970s (Ayoob, 1978: 12-13). Later, the USSR became the major supplier of weapons to the Ethiopian government. It channeled weapons to the Ethiopian government from 1978 to its implosion in 1989 (Makinda, 1992: 7). On the other side, the USA channeled weapons to the government of Sudan and Somalia during the 1980s (ibid). Several other countries also channeled weapons to the countries in the horn of Africa. The countries that channeled weapons during the Cold War and the post-Cold War to the countries of the horn of Africa include China, Israel, Egypt, and Iran (Makinda, 1992: 7; Ottaway, 1982: 36-38).

The era of the Cold War in the horn of Africa can be identified as the period whereby massive weapons were channeled and wars fueled. The first reason behind the massive channeling of weapons came because of the competition between the then superpowers, the USA and USSR. The competition between the superpowers was expanding sphere of influence. The competition for expanding sphere of influence led to dumping the horn of Africa with massive weapons. The governments that received the weapons used it to build bigger Armies and launch more destructive wars. Ethiopia was the country which receive the highest amass of weapons. The massive weapons and military assistance provided to Ethiopia enabled the country to increase its armed forces from 32, 000 in 1950s to 200,000 in late 1978 (Bell, 1973). The weapons that were channeled to Ethiopia ranged from the smallest AK-47 up to heavy “artilleries, Tanks, and squadrons of different types of military airplanes” (Fontanellaz & Cooper, 2018). The circulation of these weapons that have been supplied by mainly the USSR and the U.S. during the Cold War has also continued in post-Cold War era.

The channeling of weapons also reflected the desire of the receiving countries in the Horn of Africa. The receiving countries used the weapons they received to develop their military capability (Ottaway, 1982: 48-49). Improving in military capability was also used to support various rebel groups that were used as proxy during the conflicts with neighboring

States (Young, 2007). Historically, the relationship between governments of the Horn of Africa during the Cold War was not stable. They were engaged in conflicts. During the conflicts they supported rebels to fight proxy wars. The two bigger countries of the region are Sudan and Ethiopia. Both countries were involved in arming rebel groups in fighting proxy wars against each other during the Cold War. The conflict between the two countries used to create opportunity for the Eritrean guerrilla movements and the South Sudan rebels. Sudan supported the Eritrean guerrilla movements. Ethiopia supported South Sudan rebels. Similarly, Somalia also provided military support to Ogaden rebels of Ethiopia (Young, 2007: 11-13).

International and regional actors were involved in the channeling of weapons in the horn of Africa. Both actors that were involved had their respective goals. As explained above, the international actors such as the USA and the USSR used the weapons channeling as a means for expanding their sphere of influence. On the other hand, for the countries in the horn of Africa for importing the weapons was eagerness to expand their military capability. It was also used as a tit for tat in the conflict between the governments. For example, during the 1960s and the 1970s, Sudan allowed the Eritrean guerrilla forces to use Sudan as their base. In response, the Ethiopian government provided military support to the South Sudan rebel forces. However, when the governments reconciled it would have negative implications to the rebel groups. For example, the government of Sudan extradited a dozen of Eritrean guerrilla members to Ethiopia in October 1963 where they were arrested (Erlich, 1983: 65). In 1972, the relationship between the governments in Ethiopia and the Sudan improved and signed a treaty where they agreed to respect their territorial integrity (Erlich, 1983: 66). The government of Ethiopia helped the government of Sudan and the South Sudan rebels to sign a peace agreement (Deng, 2007: 2).

The regional actors also included countries such as Israel, Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, Libya and Chad. The countries had their respective interests in the horn of Africa. Most influential of the countries was Egypt. The interest of Egypt was related to the Nile waters that largely

originate from Ethiopia. The Nile River originates from Ethiopia passed across Sudan and flows to Egypt (Legum, 1992: 11; Makinda, 1992: 50). Another influential country in the region is Israel. Israel was interested in preventing anti-Israel sentiments from flourishing in the region. It was also interested in repatriating Ethiopians of Jewish background (Erlich, 1983: 57). There was conflict between Libya and Chad that dragged Sudan because of the common border it has with both countries (Makinda, 1992: 51). There was also a tit for tat relationship between the government of Sudan and Chad whereby they accused each other of supporting rebel groups (AUPD, 2009: 19-20).

There was a tit for tat relationships between the government of Sudan and Uganda. The government of Sudan accused Uganda of supporting the South Sudan rebel forces. The government of Uganda accused the government of Sudan of supporting the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) (Ottaway, 1982: 69-71). The government of Kenya was worried about the irredentist tendencies of the Somalis that would put the Somali inhabited territory of Kenya at risk (Ottaway, 1982: 24).

The focus of this chapter is on how the international involvements during the Cold War period linked to the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI). Two major factors are identified. One, that the channeling of weapon to the governments of the countries in the horn of Africa as discussed above. Two, that the involvements of the then superpowers' (the USSR, USA, Britain, and France) in the decolonization process in the horn of Africa. The involvement of the superpowers derailed Eritrea's right to self-determination as discussed in the next section. It presents detailed historical background to the Eritrean claim for self-determination. In doing so, it discusses the involvement of the superpowers in the decolonization process in Eritrea.



## **5.1 Historical and Legal Basis of Eritrea's Claim for Independence**

The historical and legal background to Eritrea's claim for Independence goes back to the period of Italian colonialism. Italy occupied Eritrea in late 1880s and in 1890 it declared that Eritrea was its first colony in East Africa. However, the war that erupted between Italy and Britain in 1941 in Sudan and Eritrea ended in Italy's defeat in Eritrea. The war was part of the World War II whereby the Axis powers (Italy, Japan, and Germany) on the one side and the Allied Forces (USA, USSR, Britain, and France) on the opposite side fought against each other. After defeating Italy, Britain occupied Eritrea. The Allied forces met in London in September 1945 to talk about peace with the Axis powers. In the meeting they agreed that all forces that fought against Italy would participate in a meeting to decide the future of former Italian colonies. The former Italian colonies were Eritrea, Libya, and Italian Somaliland. Ethiopia participated in the war against Italy by the side of Britain. Therefore, Ethiopia was invited to attend the meeting of deciding the fate of former Italian colonies (Spencer, 1977: 17; Tesfai, 2001: 132-133).

In the meeting, Ethiopia presented a paper claiming Eritrea and Somalia. The paper presented by the government of Ethiopia was titled "Green Memorandum". The superpowers also presented proposals on how to deal with the former Italian colonies. The proposal presented by the USA was that all three former Italian colonies to be granted independence after ten years of United Nations Trusteeship (UNT). The proposal by France was that the colonies be returned to Italy. The USSR proposed partition of Libya. It proposed that part of Libya called Tripolitania to be under Russian trusteeship, and that the fate of the remaining parts of Libya to be decided the same way as the rest of the colonies of Italy. In other words, the USSR proposed that the fate of Libya (excluding Tripolitania), Eritrea, and Italian Somaliland to be decided by the USA and Britain. The proposal presented by Britain was that Somalia including the Ogaden

part of Ethiopia to remain under British administration. Britain also proposed that Libya to be granted independence after it remained under a UNT. However, Britain decided to abstain from proposing any idea regarding the future of Eritrea. On its part, Italy rejected Ethiopia's claim to gain the territories of Eritrea and Somalia. In its proposal, Italy explained that Eritrea and Somalia were not connected to Ethiopia by any means; therefore, they should be returned to Italy (Spencer, 1977: 17-19).

The superpowers called another meeting that was held in Paris in 1946. In the Paris meeting, Britain presented a proposal in that it proposed Eritrea be partitioned into two parts. The western parts of Eritrea to be united with Sudan, and the rest of Eritrea to be united with Ethiopia. At the end of the Paris meeting in October 1946, the Axis forces (Italy and Germany) accepted that they would not retain back their former colonies. The agreement was that the four superpowers would decide on the fate of the former Italian colonies (Sinclair, 1980: 57).

The participation of Ethiopia in the meetings that were held to decide on the fate of Eritrea and other former Italian colonies created conducive environment for Ethiopia to forge diplomatic relationships with the superpowers. It also became clear that the superpowers were not keen to solve the problems of the former Italian colonies. The priority of the superpowers was their own national interests. The solutions the superpowers proposed were based on the interests of the superpowers and their Allies. Ethiopia, by virtue of joining the Allied Forces in the war against Italy, gained the sympathy of the superpowers. Therefore, the superpowers did not ignore Ethiopia's claim of territory (ibid: 19). However, Ethiopia claimed Eritrea and Somalia. The superpowers accepted Ethiopia's claim over Eritrea. The Abyssinian parts of Ethiopia had historical links to the highlands of Eritrea. Therefore, the superpowers considered Ethiopia's claim over Eritrea somehow justifiable. Ethiopia manipulated the historical link between the Abyssinian parts of Ethiopia and the highlands of Eritrea to its advantage. It used the Orthodox Church, a common Church with the Eritrean highlands, to agitate for unity

(Trevaskis, 1960; Negash, 1997). However, the case of Somalia was complicated. The superpowers could not identify any connections between Ethiopia and Somalia. To the contrary, Somalia and Ethiopia had been engaged in antagonistic relationships in their history (Zewde, 1991: 8-9). Besides, one of the superpowers, Britain, showed intention of keeping the Somalis of the horn of Africa under its administration. Britain supported the creation of Greater Somalia. The territory of Greater Somalia was supposed to include all territories inhabited by the Somali people in the horn of Africa (Sinclair, 1980: 57).

In 1947, the superpowers met to make a final decision on the fate of Eritrea. In the meeting, they agreed to establish a committee to do assessment of Eritrea. In its assessment, the Committee should assess the choice of the Eritrean people. In the meeting, it was decided that the establishment of the Committee was mandated to Britain. Based on the mandate given to it, Britain appointed a Brigadier called Frank Stafford to take the responsibility of leading the Committee that were to do the assessment of the choice of the Eritrean people. The Committee set assessment choices to be presented to the people of Eritrea. The choices were independence, unity with Ethiopia, a trusteeship under Italy, or a trusteeship under the four superpowers. The Committee selected representatives from different parts of Eritrea to participate in the assessment. The participants had to choose from the choices provided by the Committee. The result showed that fifty-six percent (56%) chose independence of Eritrea. the result was suppressed. The reason behind that was that Britain had prioritized its plan of creating Greater Somalia. For the plan to succeed, it needed to reach agreement with Ethiopia. For Ethiopia to cooperate with Britain, the plan of dividing Eritrea between Ethiopia and Sudan had to gain momentum (Tesfai, 2001: 249-250). On the other side, there was no agreement reached between all the four superpowers on how to solve the case of Eritrea. Each of the superpower countries wanted the situation to be handled in a way that it served its national interests.

Consequently, in 1948 the meetings between the superpowers reached a deadlock and they decided to hand the case of Eritrea to the United Nations (UN) (ibid).

The UN took the responsibility of deciding the future of Eritrea. However, the involvement of the superpowers had already derailed the decolonization process in favor of Ethiopia's interest in having access to the Red Sea. Ethiopia also used the diplomatic avenues that were opened before it for its favor. Therefore, Eritrea's right to self-determination was compromised. In December 1950, the UN passed a Resolution known as 390 A (V) that served to impose a ten-year Federal system of governance between Eritrea and Ethiopia.<sup>15</sup> The UN resolution of federating Eritrea and Ethiopia disregarded appeals made by representatives of majority of Eritreans. The representatives that appealed against the UN resolution were the Eritrean Muslim League (EML) and the Independence Bloc (IB) (Tesfai, 2001: 495). The superpowers were involved in the UN resolution. The USA and Britain were the main two superpowers that stood behind the resolution of federating Eritrea with Ethiopia. In 1952, the resolution was officially implemented. Ethiopia did not stop with the attainment of Federal system. It aimed to incorporate Eritrea. I recruited Eritreans who worked to annex Eritrea with Ethiopia. Gradually, Ethiopia dismantled the Federal system and annexed Eritrea (ibid).

## **5.2 An Overview of the Eritrean Armed Struggle**

As is explained and discussed extensively in the following chapters, the Eritrean armed struggle started in September 1961. The first Eritrean armed organization was called the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The ELF was formed in July 1960 in Cairo, Egypt. The ELF was formed prior to the start of the armed struggle for Eritrea's Independence. The ELF was initiated by exiled Eritrean students who were based in Cairo. The students joined veteran

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<sup>15</sup> The Final Report of the United Nation's Commissioner in Eritrea, General Assembly Official Records: Seventh Session Supplement No 15 (A/2188) 1, pp. 3-5

Eritrean politicians and some Eritreans who served in the Sudan Military Forces (SMF) in their endeavor to forming the ELF. A year later in September 1961, the ELF officially started War of Independence. The person who took the responsibility of firing the War was called Hamid Idris Awate (Markakis, 1987: 109; Dandan, 1996: 46). However, the fighters who joined Hamid Idris Awate did not have weapons. Some of them had old fashioned weapons such as old Italian and old British rifles (Dandan, 1996: 46-47).

Few years after the start of the War, the Eritrean freedom fighters increased in number, and they were armed with much better weapons. They received weapons from friendly countries that sympathized with the Eritrean case. The first and major country that provided weapons to the ELF was Syria. In 1965, the first 60 tons of weapons from the Syrian government was delivered to the Eritrean freedom fighters. However, when the weapons smuggled into Sudan, about more than 40 tons of the weapons was captured by the Sudanese security units before it was smuggled to the freedom fighters inside Eritrea. The government of Syria provided weapons to the Eritrean freedom fighters on continuous basis. In 1966, in a second round, more than 40 tons of weapons was provided by the government of Syria. In February 1967, in a third round, about 750 tons of weapons was delivered to the Eritrean freedom fighters. In March 1967, another round, 500 tons of weapons was delivered. (Dandan, 1995: 173-181).

Other Middle East countries also provided with military and related assistance. For example, Saudi Arabia helped with passage permission to the weapons to use its air space and Sea territory. It also allowed Eritrean freedom fighters to use Saudi Arabia as a transit in their way from and to countries where they received military and political trainings. Saudi Arabia also provided with money that was used to buy boats for the purpose of transporting the weapons provided by Syria and other countries. Other countries such as Iraq and Libya also helped with different types of military assistances. Somalia also provided some weapons to the Eritrean freedom fighters. Yemen also played important role in allowing its territory for passage

purposes. The delivery included Kalashnikovs, and various types of small and heavy machineguns. (Ibid). In addition to the weapons, Syria, Iraq, China, and Cuba provided military and political training to 350 Eritrean freedom fighters between 1963/4 and 1972 (Legum, 1992: 7; Makinda, 1992: 50; Dandan, 1995: 182-195; Izaz, 2016: 44). The sympathy of the Syrian government towards the case of Eritrea was also motivated by the government's interest in expanding Ba'athist ideology that advocated Pan-Arabism. The Syrian government considered that Eritrea was part of the Arab World, therefore, deserved sympathy. The support that was provided by the government of Iraq also depended on the consideration that Eritrea was a member of the Arab countries. Iraq's support to the ELF started in 1968 after the Ba'athist party came to power in Iraq. There was also support provided by the government of Libya to the ELF. The Libyan support was related to Muammar Al-Qadafi's ambitious agenda of political expansionism (Erlich, 1983: 59-61).

The country that has historical links to the horn of Africa is Egypt. The link is noticeably related to issues of the Nile waters. The largest portion of the Nile water that flows to Egypt originates from Ethiopia. Therefore, Egypt's interest during the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI) was that of Nile politics. Based on that, Egypt's stand has always been to safeguard the flow of the Nile water to Egypt. Egypt, under the leadership of Nasser, became the closest ally of Ethiopia's Haile-Selassie and major supporter of the Organization of African Union's suppression of Eritrean case (Markakis, 1987: 111).

### **5.3 Military Support to the Consecutive Ethiopia's Governments**

As mentioned above, the government of Ethiopia had forged diplomatic relationships with the Allied Forces during World War II. The relationship had lasting impact on the West's support to Ethiopia. After the defeat of Italy in Eritrea in 1941, the British and the USA were

involved in supporting the Ethiopian government in building its military. In addition to Britain the USA, and the USSR, several other Western and non-Western countries sold weapons to Ethiopia. Ethiopia imported conventional weapons from Canada, Czechoslovakia, East Germany (GDR), France, Germany (FRG), Iran, Israel, Italy, Libya, Netherlands, Romania, South Yemen, Sweden.<sup>16</sup> The weapons import was addition to what Ethiopia had already been receiving in military from the USSR and the USA. Between 1945 and 1975, the military aid Ethiopia received from the USA and the USSR has been estimated to have reached 618 million USD (Francis, 1978: 2). Between 1977 and 1991, the military aid Ethiopia received from the USSR has been estimated to have reached about 1.3 billion USD.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the major suppliers of weapons to Ethiopia during the Cold War were the USSR and the USA. In addition to the USA and the USSR, countries such as Israel, East Germany, and Cuba supported Ethiopia with weapons and other military assistances (Erlich, 1983: 22).

## **5.4 The USA Support to Haile-Selassie**

The USA military support to Ethiopia goes back to early 1950s. The governments of the USA and Ethiopia signed a 25-year mutual Defense agreement on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1953 (Fontanellaz and Cooper, 2018: 15). The reason for the USA to signing the 25-year agreement was its interest in establishing a communication relay center that was crucial for naval communication between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Ocean. The most appropriate place for the communication relay was a high plateau in Asmara, Eritrea. The US paid Ethiopia Seven Million USD per year in rent. Since Eritrea was under a Federal system with Ethiopia, the USA made its deal with the Ethiopian government. The deal was to keep the relationship between the two governments stronger (ibid).

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<sup>16</sup> The data was obtained from SIPRI Arms Transfer Database under a title: “Transfers of Major Conventional Weapons, Deliveries or Orders Made for year range 1950 to 2007” – under category Ethiopia.

<sup>17</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations, Country Listing: Ethiopia: The Derg, the Soviet Union, and the Communist World - Military History. Accessed online at: <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4517.html>

The Defense agreement that was signed between the USA and Ethiopian governments in 1953 included financial support, supply of weapons, and military training to be provided to Ethiopia. The military training was to take place including at facilities in the USA. In addition, a US Military Assistance Advisory Committee comprised of 300 personnel was set up to give military advice to the Ethiopian Military Institution. Between 1949 and 1974, the military and economic assistance that the USA provided to Ethiopia has been estimated to have reached about 450 USD (Legum and Lee, 1977: 9-10). In 1960, the USA participated, through providing weapons and related military assistance, in helping Ethiopia expand its armed forces from 32,000 to 40,000 men (Legum and Lee, 1977: 9-10). The USA commitment in assisting Ethiopia build its Army increased exponentially between 1974 and 1975. The Defense agreement between the USA and Ethiopia continued smoothly until the fall of Ethiopia's king Haile Selassie in 1974. The USA assistance intensified during the 1974 and 1975 because by then the USSR had been involved in supporting Somalia. Therefore, to counter the USSR influence in the horn of Africa, during the period 1974-1975, the USA provided Ethiopia with a 200 USD worth of surplus military aid. The total US support to Ethiopia amounted to 20 percent of all United States economic aid and 50 percent of all military aid to sub-Saharan Africa (Patman, 1990: 37).

There were two major reasons behind USA support to Ethiopia. One, that the 'utilization of the USA base rights' at Kagnew station in Asmara. The USA base rights also included a radio facility that was crucial communication at that time that was defined as 'the most important Radio facility in the World' and 'the greatest factor in security in the whole area' (Lefebvre, 1987: 472). Second, that the rivalry between the USA and the USSR. Both superpower countries were engaged in rival ideological competition and aimed to expand their respective sphere of influence. As highlighted above, Ethiopia was an old ally of the West. Therefore, the aid to Ethiopia had long history. During the Cold War, it only increased. The



assistance begun with irregular delivery of World War II surplus rifles and machineguns that later developed to the provision of modern weapons. In early 1970s, some officials from the White House confessed that ‘if not for the importance of Kagnew station, the U.S. military ‘assistance’ to Ethiopia would have been reduced’ (ibid). The Kagnew station provided various services to the USA. It served as a worldwide defense communications network and a center for intelligence data collection outpost for the continents of Africa and the Middle East. In addition, starting from the mid-1960s the functions of Kagnew station included “space research” (Patman, 1990: 37).

However, king Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was toppled by the military in 1974. The first phase of the military government lasted between 1974 and 1977. The second phase was when Mengistu Haile-Mariam murdered its opponents and officially declared the only man in the helm of power in Ethiopia in 1977. Mengistu’s militant and dictatorial leadership could not agree with USA’s policies of engagement. Later, with Mengistu’s regime choice of forging relationship with the USSR, the relationship between the USA and Ethiopia deteriorated. The USSR provided massive weapons to the Mengistu led government of Ethiopia. The support that was provided by both the USA and the USSR helped the consecutive governments of Ethiopia to build its military in Eritrea. It also enabled the consecutive Ethiopian governments to improve their fighting capabilities (Erich, 1983: 77).

## **5.5 The Support of the USSR to Mengistu**

The USSR support to the Ethiopian government under the leadership of Mengistu Hailemariam was massive military supply. The military supply that was provided to Ethiopia started after the Ethiopian government shifted its diplomatic ties from the USA to the USSR after the fall of king Haile Selassie in 1974. The supply reached its highest level in 1979. The assistance that was delivered in 1979 included military hardware that was shipped to the

Eritrean Red Sea coastal bases of Ethiopian Military Forces and Asmara. The USSR military assistance to Ethiopia included military advice and sending military commanders to lead wars against the Eritrean liberation fighters. In the fifth offensive, one of the successive military offensives that were waged by the Ethiopian government against the Eritrean liberation fighters, the USSR commanded Ethiopian armed forces in the field of war against the Eritreans. The USSR military support to Ethiopia increased exponentially in 1982 during which the value of the supplied weapons reached 2 billion USD in 1982. The year 1982 was historical during the EWL. It was the year during which the Ethiopian government mobilized all its economic and manpower resources to subdue the Eritrean liberation fighters once and for all. The military offensive was known as the sixth Offensive. It was extremely huge military Offensive against the Eritreans. The USSR was involved extremely highly. However, the Eritrean liberation fighters were not defeated.<sup>18</sup> Ethiopia received military assistance from the USSR even after the failure of the sixth Offensive to subdue the Eritrean freedom fighters. However, from 1985, due to the change that started to take place in the USSR, the supply of weapons decreased (Ottaway, 1982: 62).

The reasons behind the USSR's supply of weapons to the Ethiopian government can be categorized into two. First, that the rivalry with the USA led the USSR to look for strategic partner in the horn of Africa. Ethiopia was a renowned country in the horn of Africa that would serve as a client state in expanding the USSR's sphere of influence. Second, that the geographical location of Ethiopia was important to the USSR's policy of expansion. The importance of Ethiopia's geographical location was due its control of the Red Sea outlet that borders the narrow passage of Bab El-Mandab. The narrow passage of Bab El-Mandab is an important passage through which shipments from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean is transported. The narrow passage is used to transport light and heavy crafts, refined and crude

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<sup>18</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations, Country Listing, *Ethiopia Military History*. Accessed online at: <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4517.html>

oil, and other commercial goods from the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. The strategic importance of the Red Sea was also used to control naval communications between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea (Ottaway, 1982: 55-57).

The interest of the USA and the USSR alike also involved economic benefits to the supplier countries. As I mentioned above, the weapons that were delivered to Ethiopia were not all free aid. Out of the billions worth USSR supply to Ethiopia, only one-fourth was free aid (ibid: 62-65). Most of the weapons were sold to Ethiopia. It was debt worth billions of US dollars (Ibid: 62-65). Therefore, the involvement of the superpowers had also economic interest behind it. The economic interest was also reflected through the superpowers' involvement in safeguarding the Red Sea passage for the purpose of international trade. The superpowers used the Red Sea water lines as a corridor for international trade (ibid). Moreover, it can be argued that the USSR benefited from its direct involvement in different economic and military sectors in Ethiopia. The benefit was the deployment of its citizens to Ethiopia. The deployed citizens of the USSR were mostly fresh trainees who would practice in their fields of interest in Ethiopia. It was also employment opportunity for many citizens of the USSR.

Ethiopia also received support from the Socialist countries such as East Germany. The government of East Germany supported Ethiopia in the war against the Eritrean liberation fighters. The East German government joined the USSR in supplying its assistance to Ethiopia. In 1978, East Germany deployed its engineers to build flanking road that enabled the Ethiopian artillery units such as tanks to surprise the Eritrean liberation fighters from a behind line in northern Eritrea. The government of East Germany also sent its military personnel to assist in operating the artillery by the side of the Ethiopian Armed forces. The support also included supply of ammunitions, automatic rifles, light and heavy machineguns, and exchange of military intelligence. East Germany's support to Ethiopia continued until the implosion of the Socialist bloc during the second-half of the 1980s. The main reason behind the East Germany

support to Ethiopia was the Socialist alliance under the leadership of the USSR. The Socialist Alliance of countries that led to supporting Ethiopia also included Cuba and Yemen. All of those countries supported Ethiopia against the Eritrean freedom fighters (Ottaway, 1982: 62-65).

## **5.6 The Israel Support to Mengistu**

The successive Ethiopian governments received military support from Israel. As described above, Israel's interest in supporting the successive governments of Ethiopia can be categorized into two. First, that historical animosity that existed between Israel and the Arab States. The Arab States had geographical and historical links to the horn of Africa. The horn of Africa had trade and cultural ties with the Arab countries. Therefore, increased influence of either the Arab States or Israel would be seen as security threat to the other. To that effect, the countries in the Horn of Africa became a proxy battlefield for Israel and the Arab states. Ethiopia had taken unique position in most of its existence. The rulers of Ethiopia had for long considered that Ethiopia an isolated land of Christians which was encircled by Muslim neighbors of the Arab countries. To that effect, Ethiopia became Israel's ally in the Horn of Africa (Erlich, 1983: 56-57). Second, that Israel was interested in evacuating Ethiopian Jewish community to Israel (Brinkley, 1991).

The military support of Israel to Ethiopia started in early 1960s. Israel's military assistance to Ethiopia had the same aim as the support Ethiopia received from other countries that aimed to be used against the Eritrean liberation forces. The military support of Israel to Ethiopia included training Ethiopian paratroops and counterinsurgency units (Ottaway, 1982: 56-57). In the 1970s, Israel's training to Ethiopia's armed forces helped the Ethiopian government to build strong military in Eritrea. The military support Ethiopia received from

Israel also included ammunitions and spare parts for the weapons that were supplied by the USA. For example, Ethiopia received spare parts for the USA made F-5 jet fighter (ibid). Israel's military support to Ethiopia continued through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Ethiopia received military assistance from Israel for its cooperation in transporting Ethiopian Jewish communities to Israel. In 1984, in an operation known as "operation Moses", Israel evacuated ten-thousand Ethiopian Jewish that were known in Ethiopia as Felasha to Israel. The military assistance from Israel also included sale various types of ammunitions. In 1985 in an agreement between the two governments, Israel sold Ethiopia 20 million USD Soviet-made ammunitions. The Israel military support reached 83 million USD in 1987 (ibid). The support of Israel continued parallel with the desire to evacuate more Ethiopian Jewish (ibid: 74).

## **5.7 Ethiopia and Somalia Wars**

Wars between Ethiopia and Somalia occurred several times in modern history of the countries. The two known Wars between the two countries occurred in 1964 and in 1977-78. The major reason for the Wars was border dispute. Somalia irredentism that aspired to establish Greater Somalia by incorporating all lands inhabited by the Somali people. The Somali people inhabit lands that were partitioned into several countries in the horn of Africa by the European colonial powers. Ogaden is a Somali land in eastern Ethiopia that had become a reason for the Wars between Somalia and Ethiopia land scramble over Africa Consequently clashes over territories erupted between Ethiopia and Somalia. The European colonial rule also divided the Somalia heartland into Northern Somalia and Southern Somalia. The North was colonized by the British colonial rule, while the South was colonized by the Italian colonial rule. After the defeat of Italy by the Allied Forces, the fate of Southern Somalia (Italian Somaliland) remained controversial like Eritrea and Libya as discussed above.

However, Britain was given a mandate to rule over both Northern and Southern Somalia. The mandate given to Britain also included Ogaden, the territory in Ethiopia and a Somali inhabited territory in Kenya that was known as northern frontier district. Due to Ethiopia's withdrawal of claim over the whole Somalia territories during the 1940s superpower negotiations, it was granted Ogaden, while the northern frontier district was annexed to Kenya. Ethiopia's claim over Ogaden was related to the natural resources (such as gas and oil) available in the land of Ogaden (Ottaway, 1982: 17-18). Besides, behind the annexation of the two Somali territories to Ethiopia and Kenya can be linked to Britain's political favor towards Ethiopia and Kenya. Ethiopia and Britain made a deal that an American company called Sinclair Oil Company be granted the right to explore oil in Ogaden. While Ethiopia's withdrawal of its claim over Somalia meant that the Northern and Southern Somalia did not have impediment to exercise their right to self-determination. After their independence in 1960, both the Northern Somaliland and South Somaliland agreed to form a united Somalia (Spencer, 1977: 27-30). However, with the independence and unification of the Northern and Southern Somalia, irredentist tendencies among Somalis that claimed all Somalia territories to be re-incorporated into a bigger Somalia (ibid).

The irredentist tendencies created a situation whereby the government of Somalia pursued a policy that reflected Somali irredentism. In its attempts to realize the formation of Greater Somalia, the government of Somalia sought support from sympathizer countries. In its early years it received some sympathy from the USA and the USSR. However, the military support that was provided by the USA and USSR was limited. After its 1964 war with Ethiopia, Somalia asked the USA for military support to help improve its military capability. The USA declined the request of the government of Somalia (Legum & Lee, 1977: 9-10).

In 1969, the government of Somalia was toppled by a military coup. The military cop was led by Siad Barre. The military that conducted the cop called itself the Somali Republic

Council and adopted a 'Marxist-Leninist' policy known as 'scientific socialism'. (Ottaway, 1982: 64-65). The 'Marxist-Leninist' endorsement enabled the new government of Somalia to forge ties with the governments of the USSR and Russia. The relationship with both Socialist countries enabled the Somali government to improve its army's capability. The USSR military support to Somalia included T-34 tanks, armored personnel carriers, MiG-15 and MiG-17 aircraft, small arms, and ammunition. In addition, military training through which 500 Somali pilots received training in the USSR. The military support also included military advice given to the Somali Military (ibid: 66-67).

Somalia managed to forge good relationship with the USSR in early 1974. As a result, in 1974 both governments signed an agreement that was known as "Treaty of Friendship Cooperation". The treaty improved Somalia's Military capability. The USSR supplied modern military equipment to Somalia. The supply included MiG-21 Jet Fighters, SAM-2 missile defense system, T-54 Tanks, Navy weapons such as torpedo, missile armed fast attacker, and landing craft. Somalia received military support from the USSR until their relationships dwindled due to the political change in Ethiopia and the USSR tilted towards Ethiopia. The decline of the relationship occurred after a "Marxist-oriented" government took power in Ethiopia. In 1977, the USSR took firm side with Ethiopia and the relationship between Somalia and the USSR ended (ibid: 74). Another factor for the decline of the relationship between the government of Somalia and the USSR was the relationship between the government of Somalia and the Arab World. The relationship between Somalia and the Arab World had a long history. In early 1960s, Somalia was already a member of the Arab League. However, many Arab countries did not have relationship with the USSR. Therefore, the relationship between Somalia and the USSR was not welcomed by the Arab countries. To that end, the relationship between the government of Somalia and the Arab World affected Somalia's relationship with the USSR negatively (ibid: 82).

After it ended its relationship with the government of Somalia, the USSR shifted to Ethiopia. The USSR military support to Ethiopia intensified by the end of 1977. In the first supply, the USSR supplied Ethiopia with 60 thousand tons of military hardware. It included fighter aircrafts, tanks, artillery, ammunitions, and other military equipment. The USSR military supply was delivered by fifty USSR ships that were unloaded at the port of Assab, Eritrea. The supply aimed to help the government of Ethiopia in its 1977-1978 war against Somalia. Between November 1977 and February 1978, the USSR delivered additional massive military support to Ethiopia. An estimated 225 airlift transports were made to Ethiopia in an interval of only 25 minutes. In the massive USSR military delivery to Ethiopia, transport aircrafts and Antonov An-225 were used. The transport fleet that was involved in transporting the military supply were estimated to have been 15% of the USSR fleet at that time. The massive military supply included eighty aircraft, 600 tanks, and 300 APCs with an estimated value of \$ 1 billion.<sup>19</sup>

After the USSR shifted its support to Ethiopia, the government of Somalia approached the Arab countries for support. To that end, between 1977 and 1991, the support given to Somalia was supplied from the Arab World. The major countries that supplied Somalia with military support included Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, and Jordan. Egypt provided Somalia with ammunition and spare parts for some of Somalia's Soviet-made equipment, such as T-54/T-55 tanks and armored personnel carriers, T-54 and T-55 tanks, 37mm antiaircraft guns, and ammunition. Saudi Arabia provided Somalia with a variety of weapons, including armored and reconnaissance vehicles, light weapons, and ammunition (Ottaway, 1982: 17-18).

For its 1978-78 war against Somalia, Ethiopia also received military aid from Cuba. The military support from the Cuban government included 17,000 Cuban soldiers who fought by

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<sup>19</sup> Encyclopedia of the Nations, Country Listing, *Ethiopia - Military History*. Accessed online at: <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4517.html>



the Ethiopian side against Somalia. The participation of the Cuban soldiers by the Ethiopian side played a decisive role in defeating Somalia in March 1978. Ethiopia also received military support from the government of South Yemen. The support involved sending 2000 Yemeni soldiers who participated by the side of Ethiopia against Somalia. East Germany also participated by the side of Ethiopia against Somalia (ibid: 86). The military support that was provided by different Socialist countries enabled Ethiopia to win the war against Somalia (ibid: 86-87).

On their turn, the governments of Ethiopia and Somalia used the military support they received to arm rebel groups against each other. The government of Somalia supported the Ogaden rebel group that was known as the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). The WSLF fought against Ethiopian government in the mid of 1970s and participated by the side of Somali National Army during the 1977 war. The WSLF later became a foundation for the formation of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in 1984. The ONLF called for the right of self-determination to the Ogaden region of Eastern Ethiopia.<sup>20</sup> The Somalia government also supported the Eritrean armed forces. On its part, the Ethiopian government supported Northern Somalia to take up arms against the central government of Somalia. Accordingly, the Northern Somalis formed a movement called Somaliland National Movement (SNM.). At the second half of the 1980s, the SNM controlled many areas in Northern Somalia (Ottaway, 1982: 120-121).

The military supply that was provided by different countries to Somalia had significant impact to the power dynamics of the country. The weakening of its military after its defeat in Ogaden and the expansion of the SNM armed movement contributed immensely to the fragmentation of the central government of Somalia. This led to power struggle between different Somalia's military generals who sought support from their respective clans. After the

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<sup>20</sup> The objectives of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): Accessed from the ONLF website, <http://onlf.org/>

central government of Somalia disintegrated in 1991, the former military generals turned into warlords through the support of their respective clans.

The following section will examine the nature and intensity of the military supply that took place during the war in South Sudan.

## **5.8 The South Sudan Wars**

The wars of that occurred in South Sudan had their roots in the historical background of Sudan. Sudan under the Turko-Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian colonial administration had negative impact on the relationship between South Sudan and the rest of Sudan. Historically the existence of black African people who originated from or related to the peoples of South Sudan lived in different parts of Sudan. They lived in places such as Khartoum. They were also extended as far as southern Egypt. For example, the divine institutions of the Kingdom of Shiluk are believed to have similarities to that of the Kingdom of Kush (750-300 BC) that existed in northern Sudan and southern Egypt. Besides, the Funj Sultanate of Sinnar that existed during the 16th century was a Kingdom of black people that was linked to the peoples of south-Sudan (Beshir, 1968: 9).

Trade was important factor in linking the peoples of South Sudan to the rest of Sudan. South Sudan was considered an important place to conduct commercial activities. Commercial activities in the historical South Sudan were explained in relation with adventures of exploration that was conducted by the sultanates of Sinnar and Darfur into the territories of South Sudan and Nuba Mountains in Kordofan. Historically there were raids of neighboring tribes conducted by the sultans of Sinnar or Darfur, often in alliance with a local chief “for grain and cattle to exchange with tusks”; and the prisoners ended up being slaves of the merchants who would finally sell them for lucrative income (ibid: 11).

During the Turko-Egyptian rule over Sudan, slave trade expanded and developed into big commercial activity that became profitable. According to Beshir(1968), the main traders who were engaged in slave trade were European merchants who were established in Khartoum. The Europeans hired armed group from the Arab tribes of the Sudan. On their part, the armed groups held deals with local chiefs and executed the raids. European creditors funded these slave trade projects. The initial intention of the raids was set to be search for ivory, which could only be materialized through the cooperation from the local communities. The Arab subordinate merchants were motivated by the encouragement they received from the European creditors to own slaves they captured in confrontation when searching for ivory. The confrontations and violence occurred when the locals refused to cooperate. Such usage of force led to the development of armed forces owned by merchants. Some of the prominent merchants who owned their own private armies included Al Zubair Rahma and Al Aqqad (ibid: 12-13).

Therefore, the two groups that were involved in the commercial activities in South Sudan were the European and the Arab merchants. The controversial issue was whether the Arab merchants or the European was more prone and responsible for the violent approach against the southern Sudanese in their dealing with the slave trade. One view sees the blame against the Arabs as ‘the rapacious slave traders’ a tale that was used to embitter the relationship between the South and the North. Instead, this view considers the role of the Europeans as “amongst the foremost participants” (Gray, 1961: 12) in the commercial activities of slave trade in Africa during which Sudan became one of the known places (Beshir, 1968: 12-3). There was also a different viewpoint that rejected the commercial activities of slave trade in South Sudan. This view attributed the raids for slave trade to the northern Sudan (Wai, 1973: 13). However, the slave trade had been challenged with resistance from local population of South Sudan (ibid).

In 1860, Khedive Ismael who served as Turkey’s viceroy to Egypt prohibited slave trade in his domain that included the Sudan. However, the slave merchants did not stop the slave

trade throughout the 1860s and the 1870s. After the appointment of the British ruler General Gordon as Governor of Equatoria (South Sudan), ivory that was part of the lucrative trade was monopolized by the government. The British rule also prohibited the trade of weapons. Controversially, a merchant by a name Al-Zubair Rahma, who was known as a notorious merchant in South Sudan, was appointed as a Governor of Bahr al Ghazal that was the area close to the area where commercial activities of slave trade weapons took place (Beshir, 1968: 13).

Between 1898 and 1952 Sudan was under the Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule. Local resistance against the slave trade and exploitation of resources of South Sudan, external incursions, including the Anglo-Egyptian administration, continued. On the other hand, slave trade never ceased to exist (Wai, 1973: 13-14). An administrative policy that was provided by the Anglo-Egyptian rule over Sudan known as the “Southern policy” was implemented. The “Southern policy” was part of the colonial Administration’s policy of making each province “as self-contained and independent as possible” (Abd-Alrahim, 1969: 73; Beshir, 1968: 40-41). Therefore, it can be inferred that the “southern policy” granted South Sudan a closed administrative system that prevented any social and cultural contacts with North Sudan.

The administrative system in Sudan changed from time to time. In 1930, a policy of ruling the North Sudan and the South Sudan separately was implemented. The policy of separate administration served as barrier to any social, cultural, and commercial interchanges between the North and South Sudan. This policy was also related to the policy of “closed districts” that passed in 1922 and declared Darfur, Equatoria and Upper Nile and parts of Northern Khordofan, Jazeera, and Kassala provinces as “closed districts”. This declaration prohibited non-Sudanese from entering without permit from the Civil Secretary/British representative in Sudan (Beshir, 1968: 41-42).

The “Southern Policy” had become a topic of controversy. Three viewpoints can be identified on why the Anglo-Egyptian administration decided to come up with the policy. The first viewpoint divides the policy into two phases of administration. The first phase covered the years between 1889 and 1919. It was described as the time of passive administration. The second phase that covered the time after the year 1924. The second phase followed a revolt in North Sudan. The revolt had two forms mixed as one. There was a mutiny within the colonial army and the uprising of graduates that was described as active and interventionist. Part of the intervention was the permission given to Christian Missionaries to enter South Sudan for religious activities. According to this view, the intention of allowing the missionary to enter south-Sudan was arrogant and ill that it wanted the missionary to teach the ‘savage’ southerners “elements of common sense, good behavior, and obedience to government authority” (Abd Al-Rahim, 1969: 73). The second viewpoint regarding the “Southern policy” was that the policy as part of an administrative approach aimed to grant the native population in all parts of Sudan the authority of administering their respective districts under the supervision of the colonial administration. It intended to encourage local chiefs and their courts and the traditional authorities of the local population (Beshir, 1968: 37). The third viewpoint is that the “Southern policy” was an attempt to prevent the south Sudanese tribes from the ruthless dealing with the locals by foreign incursions (Wai, 1973: 15).

The relationship between the Southern parts of Sudan and the Northern parts of Sudan deteriorated from time to time. In a conference that was held in Juba, South Sudan, in 1947, representatives of South Sudan discussed the future relationship between North and South Sudan. In the conference, the majority of South Sudanese had decided to unite with the North Sudan and form a united country. However, a different argument views the issue of unity as had already been decided for the Southerners by the bureaucracy of the government in the North. This argument viewed that the Juba conference was about whether to include the

Southerners in the National Legislative Assembly. Some of the South Sudanese who participated in the Juba conference expressed their fear and suspicion of the North and they indicated their reservation on the rush for unity between the North and the South. Despite the reservations, unity was established between North and South in 1947. Agreements were made for federal type of relationship to safeguard against cultural assimilation, the monopoly of policymaking, of jobs, social services, and economic development plans (ibid: 16-17).

After a united Sudan had been formed, several measures were taken to ensure the continuity of the formed Sudan. The consolidating of Sudan was known “Sudanization”. The process of Sudanization included nationalization of employments. However, the project of “Sudanization” disappointed many South Sudanese people. In 1955, Sudan soldiers of South Sudan origin revolted, and a mutiny occurred within the structures of the military of Sudan. South Sudanese units in the Sudan national army rebelled against the domination of the Northerners. The mutiny is known as the first South Sudan rebellion that was called the *Anyanaya* (ibid: 18-19).

1995 marked the start of the first South Sudan rebellion. The rebellion continued until 1972. Many countries supplied weapons to the South Sudan *Anyanya* rebel groups. Among the countries that supplied weapons to the rebels were Ethiopia, Israel, and Uganda. Ethiopia was used as a corridor to transport weapons to the rebels that were provided by Israel during the 1960s. In 1972, Ethiopia facilitated a negotiated settlement between the government of Sudan and the South Sudan rebels. In the meeting where the negotiated settlement was signed, the negotiators were the government of Ethiopia, the All-African Council of Churches and six other African countries. The agreement granted South Sudan a regional autonomy that had a separate legislative, executive and judiciary powers. Based on the agreement, the *Anyanya* rebel members became part of the Sudanese National Army and were absorbed in all the Military units of the country’s Military and Police Forces (ibid).

The successful negotiated settlement that was signed between the South Sudan rebels and the central government of Sudan in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1972 was a diplomatic victory for the Ethiopian government. The diplomatic relationships between the two countries improved. On the part of it, the improvement of relationships between the two governments had negative implications to the Eritrean liberation forces that had bases in Sudan, as discussed above. It curtailed the free movements and activities of the Eritrean forces in the Sudan.

The agreement between the South Sudan rebels and the central government of Ethiopia that was signed in 1972 was violated by the central government of Sudan. The central government abolished the rights of the administrative autonomy granted to South Sudan and imposed an Islamic Sharia Law on South Sudan. Resistance ensued in South Sudan and the Second rebellion erupted. The rebellion led to the formation of the Sudan People Liberation Movement/ Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA). During the 1980s, the SPLM/SPLA received military support from the USSR that was facilitated by the government of Ethiopia. It also received a direct support from the Ethiopian government.

From the outset, the SPLA had the support of the government of Ethiopia under Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam (Human Rights Watch, 1991: 325-346). This included the provision of uniforms, logistical support, arms, ammunition, military training, and even political direction. SPLA units based in the Gambela region in western Ethiopia participated in joint military operations with Ethiopian forces against Oromo rebels, and Ethiopian forces supported the SPLA in border clashes with Sudanese government troops. When Mengistu's government collapsed in 1991, the SPLA, viewed as an enemy by the new Ethiopian government, was suddenly stripped not only of this rearguard support but also of access from Ethiopia to the territory it controlled within Sudan.<sup>21</sup>

The crucial 'interest' in supporting Southern Sudanese rebel movements has been that of Israel. As I explained above in the Eritrean section, any Arab political or cultural influence in the region would not be tolerated by Israel. As it had been the case in both the 1967 and 1973

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<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Civilian Devastation: Abuses by All Parties in the War in Southern Sudan*.

Arab Israel war, it was none but Egypt who threatened Israel's military confidence (Piccirilli, 1989). Therefore, supporting rebel movements in Sudan can contribute to counter Egypt's presence in the region. More often, due to the historical ties between the successive governments in both countries, Sudan served as Egypt's satellite country. In most cases, Israel's hand has remained invisible. It implemented its plans via a third country. In this case, Ethiopia was the best choice. Ethiopia, in its part, needed the support of Israel, as Israel could also serve as a suitable corridor to the West to deal with the Eritrean liberation forces.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

Talking about the EWI cannot make sense without examining the international involvements that occurred into occurrence. First, that the role played by the superpowers (USA, USSR, Britain, and France) during the second half of the 1940 in derailing the process of decolonization in Eritrea in favor of Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea. Second, that the nature and magnitude of the armament and arms transfers that took place during the Cold War era in the Horn of Africa as a complex region.

In addition to the arms supplied by the USSR and the USA, several other countries were also involved in militarizing the Horn of Africa. Some of the countries involved were Syria, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, and Uganda. Syria and Iraq supplied arms, military training and financial supports to the Eritrean liberation forces. Israel supported Ethiopian governments and the South Sudan rebel forces. Uganda supported the South Sudan rebel forces. Egypt supported the Ethiopian governments.



## **Chapter 6**

### **ELF: From Formation to Implosion**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the third critical theme of the study. It entails the formation process of the political organization called the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) that waged the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI) in September 1961. The formation process of the ELF reveals important aspects on how the nature of power relationships began to develop. The theme also entails the implosion of the ELF after a decade long of internal power struggle in 1969. The implosion of the ELF reveals important aspects on how the nature of power relationships changed and how its trends developed over time. In doing so, the composition and structure of the ELF in its outset and further will be presented. Personalities who played key roles in forming the ELF will be identified and their roles discussed.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section presents a clandestine movement called the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) that preceded the ELF. The ELM was a peaceful movement formed in 1956. However, after the ELF was formed in September 1961, the ELM disintegrated gradually. The second section presents how the relationship between the ELM and the ELF developed. The third section presents the phases of formation of the ELF. The fourth section presents the implosion of the ELF. The fifth section presents the re-grouping of the splinter groups and a formation of a new faction known as the Peoples Liberation Front (PLF).

## 6.1 ELM: The Clandestine Movement

According to Mohammed Saeed Nawud (1996), the founding father of the ELM, the ELM was founded on 2 November 1958 in Port Sudan, Sudan. The ELM was known for its Arabic name *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea*, translated into the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM).<sup>22</sup> Many Eritreans lived in Sudan and some of the founders happened to be from those Eritreans who lived in Port Sudan. According to Nawud (1996), the Movement was largely influenced by the post-WW II phenomenon, whereby nationalist movements for independence from Asia to Africa were on a rise. In Africa, from Egypt to Sudan to Ghana and other parts, the call for national independence was widely amplified.

In Eritrea, the situation was different. On 02 December 1952, the UN had sanctioned a resolution 390 A (V) that put Eritrea under federation with Ethiopia (UN General Assembly Official Records 7<sup>th</sup> Session, 1952: 2). The government of Ethiopia – in search for Sea Outlet – had been fiercely involved in Eritrean affairs violating the Federation arrangement. In response, Eritreans - inside and outside of Eritrea – opposed the moves by the Ethiopian government. Inspired by the independence Movements all over the World and worried by Ethiopia's moves<sup>23</sup> to dismantle the Federal arrangement, the founders of the ELM were motivated to take the initiative of forming the ELM (Nawud, 1996: 8-9).

Ethiopia's moves to dismantle the Federal arrangement had been manifested via several measures. In early 1952, the Ethiopian government imposed its constitutional laws and orders

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<sup>22</sup> It appears in a book written in Arabic language by the founding chairman of the ELM: Mohammed Saeed Nawud (1996, p. 8), (English Translation: (Eritrean Liberation Movement: The Truth and the History); It also appears in the book written in Arabic language by one of the key leaders of the ELM: Tahir Ibrahim Fadab (1994, p. 53). *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea wa Masirataha Al Tarikhiya, 1958-1967* (English Translation: The Eritrean Liberation Movement and its Historical March 1958-1967. Alshrooq Publishers

<sup>23</sup> Ethiopian moves were to annex Eritrea by any means necessary. It involved violence against the Eritrean who opposed the violation of the Federal arrangements. Eritreans went out the street demonstrating their rejection of Ethiopia's moves. The Ethiopian government threatened and arrested many of the demonstrators and followers. Tahir Ibrahim Fadab in his book, (My Translation of the book's title: Eritrean Liberation Movement and its Historical March, 1958-1967) explains that the deterioration of the Federal arrangement by the intervention of the Ethiopian government was a pushing factor to launching the ELM.

on Eritrea. Eritrea was subjected to the jurisdiction of the Ethiopian courts. In August 1952, the Ethiopian government confiscated all Italian properties in Eritrea disregarding the provisions of the Federal arrangement that prohibited to do so. In May 1953, the government of Ethiopia seized Eritrean revenue and budget. Then the Ethiopian government ordered to freeze the newly formed union of Eritrean workers and closed Eritrean Newspaper called “voice of Eritrea” (Fadab, 1994: 29).

According to Fadab (1994), Ethiopia’s violation of the federal arrangement resulted in not only the annexation of Eritrea, but also forced many Eritreans to flee Eritrea. Many Eritreans left for Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, and other countries. Some of those who arrived in Sudan were workers and some others were students, who arrived in Sudan to pursue higher education. Generally, Educational opportunity for Eritreans improved during the British Military Administration (BMA) compared to the Italian colonial system. Schools – at elementary level - opened in several areas in Eritrea during the 1940s under the British colonial rule. However, those who completed their elementary education had limited opportunities to pursue higher education inside Eritrea. Therefore, many students went to neighboring countries – such as Sudan - to pursue higher education. Being in Sudan, the country’s political movements for national independence influenced the Eritrean students in Sudan. The Sudanese political activities for national independence had been widely expressed through Newspapers and other Media outlets. Besides, there were Sudanese teachers, who were employed as elementary school teachers in Eritrean schools that taught in Arabic language. Therefore, the influence over Eritreans did not start when they arrived in Sudan, but earlier when the Sudanese were recruited to teach in Eritrea. Eritrean students were inspired by their Sudanese teachers who discussed the importance of national independence. The inspiration grew stronger when they arrived in Sudan (Fadab, 1994: 48 – 49).

Those Eritreans in Sudan, in general, and particularly the youth were emotionally attached to their country, Eritrea. They were ambitious to see Eritrea joined the independence movements prevailed in different parts of Africa and elsewhere in the world. As they lived in Sudan, they were closely influenced by the Sudanese political developments. Most of the youth who founded the ELM were mainly influenced by the Sudanese Communist Party (Nawud, 1996: 46-47; Fadab, 1994: 53-54; Markakis, 1987: 106). However, the political resistance - against Ethiopian violation of the Federal arrangement - that continued inside Eritrea had also significant impact on the political thinking of the Eritreans in Sudan. Resistance inside Eritrea manifested through disobediences, riots, posting and distributing of flyers by small groups and individuals (Tesfai, 2016: 401-407).

Tahir Ibrahim Fadab, who was recruited into the ELM on 5 February 1959 (about three months after the first meeting on 2 November 1958), in his book<sup>24</sup> about the ELM explained what he knew about the foundation of the movement. Fadab admittedly said that he had no idea who the pioneer founder of the ELM was. However, he knew something about those who recruited him to join the ELM. For example, he explained that Mohammed Saeed Nawud was a former youthful Cell (small group) member of the Sudanese Communist Party in its Port Sudan branch. He was a leader of a 7-member Cell. Fadab said that most of the 7-member group, if not all, were Eritreans who later turned their Cell's activity into Eritrean underground activities instead of the Sudanese Communist Party's activities (Fadab, 1994: 54).

According to Tahir Ibrahim Fadab, Mohammed Saeed Nawud and his Colleagues had been recruited into the Sudanese Communist Party as underground members. The Sudanese Communist Party's membership was structured along a 7-member underground Cell. Nawud was the leader of a 7-member underground Cell in which he was the chairman. When Nawud

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<sup>24</sup> Tahir Ibrahim Fadab (1994, p. 54). *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea wa Masirataha Al Tarikhiya, 1958-1967* (My Translation: The Eritrean Liberation Movement and its Historical March 1958-1967. Alshrooq Publishers

and his colleagues decided to turn their Cell into an Eritrean Movement, they applied the communist underground recruitment model, forming group structure composed of 7-member Cell and all secret operational skills. Once they became 17 members,<sup>25</sup> they held their first congress on 2 November 1958. The meeting marked their separation from the Sudanese Communist Party and embarked on Eritrean politics.

However, Mohammed Saeed Nawud rejected the explanation that the idea of underground organization was a copy from the experience in the Sudanese Communist Party. He explained three reasons that led them (Nawud and Co.) to form an underground organization (Nawud, 1996: 50-51). The first reason arose because of the closed political situation the people of Eritrea underwent under the Ethiopian occupation force. Ethiopian government violently cracked down all means of political freedoms that existed prior to the federal arrangement. Ethiopia's violent responses to the Eritrean resistance did not allow free political activity. Consequently, it became difficult for the former Eritrean politicians and the emerging resistance to resist openly. The second reason that led to the formation of an underground organization was the belligerent policy of the then government of Sudan towards Eritreans in the country (Ibid: 55-58). Between 1958 to 1964, the belligerent policy of Ibrahim Aboud's government towards Eritreans in Sudan forced them to go underground. The third reason was an idea of launching a revolutionary coup – to be organized secretly and by infiltrating all Ethiopian government institutions including the police and security - inside Eritrea through which they thought Eritrea's independence would be achieved. (Nawud, 1996: 46-47; Dandan, 1995: 44).

According to Nawud (1996), the first group of founders of the ELM were likeminded young Eritreans, who lived in Sudan. Some of them were students and others were workers in

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<sup>25</sup> Tahir Ibrahim Fadab (1994, Pp. 55 – 56) listed 17 names of the General Leadership of the ELM. They were: 1. Mohammed Saeed Idris Nawud 2. Tesfay Woldemariyam 3. Mohammed Al-Hassan Osman 4. Yassin Mohammed Saleh Aqada 5. Tewolde Wolde Kahsay 6. Al Shaiykh Mohammed Al-Dankali 7. Osman Mohammed Osman 8. Abdalqader Ismail 9. Idris Mohammed Al-Hassan 10. Omar Mohammed Qonhat 11. Hassan Al-Haj Idris 12. Habib Gaas 13. Tesfay Maasho 14. Mohammed Abdalla Osman 15. Saleh Ahmed Iyay 16. Al-Shaikh Osman Mohammed 17. Ahmed bin Mahjoub

different professions. The key role player in founding the ELM was Mohammed Saeed Nawud (Nawud, 1996). Mohammed Saeed Nawud explained that - in the beginning - the closest friend to discuss with about political developments was Idris Mohammed Al-Hassen. When they decided to launch an underground movement on their own, the first step they took was to identify likeminded Eritreans whom Nawud and his friend Mohammed Al-Hassen trusted.

Nawud explained when they managed to recruit first seven members, they held the founding congress. Nawud did not explain - in his book - why they decided for a group to be composed of seven members. The founding congress was held in Mohammed Saeed Nawud's residence in Port Sudan on 2 November 1958 (Nawud, 1996: 43). The date at which the founding congress (first meeting) was held by the pioneer founders marked the birth of the ELM. They chose its name to be *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea* (in Arabic). Then it was translated into Tigringya by an Eritrean named Tesfay into *Ghedli Harnet Ertra*. Tesfay was one of those who were recruited early when the Movement was founded. And its English translation became Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) (Ibid).

According to Nawud (1996: 45-46), the founding members of the ELM who took oath in starting the movement were Mohammed Saeed Nawud, Idris Mohammed Hassen Qanshara, Hassan Al-Haj Idris, Osman Mohammed Osman, Yassin Mohammed Saleh Aqada, Mohammed Al-Hassen Osman Mahmoud, Saleh Ahmed Iyay, and Habib Omar Gaas. The founding congress was followed by forming Cells (underground groups) composed of Eritreans in Port Sudan, where the founding members lived. The organizational structure of the ELM was divided into seven-member Cell, and branches in Sudan, Eritrea, Middle East, and Ethiopia. The seven-member Cell would recruit seven Cells composed of seven members each. That way there would be several seven-member Cells in all branches. The first branch formed was in Port Sudan. The second branch was formed in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. The third branch

formed was in Madani, Sudan. Then continued in different countries such as Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia.

Nawud (1996) explained that the ELM inside Eritrea was divided into two geographical divisions of duty. The first geographical division, which was supervised under the Keren branch, included the Sanhit, Sahel and Western lowlands of Eritrea. It was headed by Saleh Ahmed Iyay. The second division, which was supervised under the Asmara branch, included the Eritrean highlands, the Samhar Red Sea region including Dankalia and Ethiopia. The division was headed by Yassin Mohammed Saleh Aqada. Nuru Abdulhay and Mohammedberhan Hassen founding members of the Asmara branch also confirmed the two geographical divisions of duty as it was explained by Nawud.<sup>26</sup> Both Yassin Aqada and Saleh Iyay were part of the founding members of the ELM who convened in Port Sudan on 2 November 1958; and were, then, delegated to create branches inside Eritrea.<sup>27</sup>

The Eritrean Police, which was under Ethiopia's Federal arrangement and heavily infiltrated by the Ethiopian government, was disturbed by the political resistance run all over the country. The police did not know if there was a force behind the ongoing resistance. Eritrean resistance intensified particularly when Ethiopia begun violating the Federal arrangement. Individuals and groups alike took their own initiatives in expressing their opposition to Ethiopia's encroachment. Students, workers, teachers, sportsmen, and members of the police participated.<sup>28</sup>

On 12 July 1962, a hand grenade attack happened on an occasion where Ethiopia's representative in Eritrea, General Abiy Abebe, was a visiting guest. He was on a propaganda

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<sup>26</sup> From my, this researcher, interview with veteran founding member of the ELM Asmara Branch, Nuru Abdulhay. Interview conducted on 07 March 2021. Also see a book written in Arabic language by a veteran founding member of the ELM Asmara Branch, Mohammedberhan Hassen (2001, p.33). *Harakat Tahrir Eritrea: MahaTaminMahaTat Maseerat Nidaluna Al-WaTani* (Translated: The ELM: A Stage from the Stages Along the March of our National Struggle)

<sup>27</sup> The structure of the movement was explained by the ELM founding leaders such as Mohammed Saeed Nawud, Tahir Ibrahim Fadab, Mohammedberhan Hassan, and Nuru Abdulhay.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

mission to mobilize support to Ethiopia's action of annexing Eritrea into Ethiopia. The hand grenade attack happened in a town called Agordat, the capital of western lowlands of Eritrea. Ten months earlier to the attack, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) had already launched an armed struggle. It was a small group of the ELF who threw the hand grenade. Four people were killed, and the Ethiopian General and other invited dignitaries injured. (Dandan 1995: 58). In my interview with Nuru Abdulhay, one of the founding members of the ELM Asmara Branch, explained that followed the grenade attack in Agordat, as described above, the Eritrean police found some printing materials of the ELM branches in Agordat and Keren. The police then arrested many innocent people, who were tortured and some of them hanged to death. The incident was a breakthrough hint for the Eritrean police through which they knew there was an underground political movement.<sup>29</sup>

By the end of 1962, members of the ELM branches in all Eritrean towns went out to the streets condemning Ethiopia's actions of annexing Eritrea into Ethiopia. For example, the ELM Asmara branch - by the order of its leadership in Port Sudan - organized a surprising demonstration in the streets of Asmara. The demonstration led to arrests of many demonstrators including key leaders of the ELM; therefore, a complete crackdown of the underground resistance in Asmara. The ELM's Asmara branch key leaders were arrested and tortured. Nuru Abdulhay was one of the key leaders of the branch who was arrested and tortured together with several of his comrades. In my interview with Nuru Abdulhay, he mentioned some of the key leaders of the ELM Asmara Branch who were exposed to arrest and torture.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> From the interview I conducted with a veteran founding member of the ELM Asmara Branch, Nuru Abdulhay. Interview conducted on 07 March 2021.

<sup>30</sup> According to my interviewee, Nuru Abdulhay, the ELM Asmara branch leadership was composed of 1) Yassin Mohammed Saleh Aqada 2) Nuru Abdulhay 3) Saeed Yassin Nessredin 4) Ahmedin Abdulkader 5) Mahmoud Ismail Al-Haj 6) Tukue Yihdeghe 7) Mohammed Zubuy 8) Woldemikael Abraha 9) Debessay Ghebreselassie 10) Saeed Derenkay 11) Kahsay Bahlibi 12) Mohammedbirhan Hassen 13) Abdusalam Abdalla 14) Mohammedbirhan Negash 15) Mussa Arraho.

Nuru Abdulhay and Mohammedberhan Hassen explained that the ELM Asmara branch was founded under the leadership of Yassin Mohammed Saleh Aqada in October 1960. Aqada was one of the General top leadership of the ELM who founded the Movement in Port Sudan on 11 November 1958. In October 1959 Aqada arrived in Asmara to initiate the formation of ELM Asmara branch. However, two months after his arrival in Asmara was



Nuru Abdulhay explained further that the arrests led to the exposure of the seven-member Cell structure of the ELM. During the investigation of the arrested members of the ELM, the Eritrean police used “seven-member Cell” organizational structure as an identification of the ELM. The phrase used was a Tigringya language definition of the “seven-membered Cell”, which is “*Mahber Shewate*” translated “Association of Seven”. Later, particularly in the highlands, the ELM was known as “*Mahber-ShewAte*”. The Asmara branch conducted its founding meeting in October 1960 in Asmara. In mid-1962, with the crackdown and arrest of its key leaders, the ELM’s Asmara branch ended its functions.

According to Nawud (1996), the ELM was a nationalist and secular Movement. It embraced all Eritreans regardless of their religious and tribal background. It rejected divisions of all sorts among Eritreans. To that end, its members were Muslims and Christians alike. It included students, teachers, workers, traders, military and police personnel, and sportsmen. Therefore, religion, tribe, and/or class divide did not pose problems of power dynamics within the Movement. According to Nawud (1996), the Movement set four stages to achieve the liberation of Eritrea: (1) The stage of the foundation of the Movement that started on 2 November 1958 (2) The stage of propagation, expanding, educating and awareness (3) The stage of selection and planning (4) The stage of implementing the revolutionary coup. (Nawud, 1996: 48-49). The Movement aspired to achieve its goal – liberating Eritrea – through peaceful means of struggle. However, after the newly emerged armed struggle by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the ELM attempted to change the peaceful resistance into Armed resistance (Ibid).

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arrested and was released after six months in prison. Only after his release from prison that he contacted trusted Eritreans to form the first group. The first founding members Amara branch was composed of Abdusalam Abdalla, Nuru Abdulhay, Mohammedberhan Hassan, Saeed Yassin Nasredin, and Ahmedin Abdulkader.

## 6.2 The relationship between the ELM and the ELF

The relationship between the ELM and the ELF was tense from the beginning. The main issue of difference was *modus operandi* applied by both organizations in liberating Eritrea. The ELM applied peaceful resistance while the ELF was an armed organization. However, the secretive nature of the ELM also played significant role in complicating the relation between the two organizations. Many of the ELM members did not know who started the organization and who its key leaders were. Recruiting members for the underground movement had its challenge particularly after the ELF was formed and engaged the people of Eritrea openly. Many key members of the ELM saw the ELF as a viable and joined the ELF. (Mohammedberhan, 2001: 98).

According to Fadab (1994: 75), the ELM approached the ELF's leadership and proposed unity between the two organizations. He explained that the ELM discussed issue of unity with Idris Mohammed Adem and Osman Saleh Sabbe. He further noted that the ELM had recruited Idris Mohammed Adem and became a member of the ELM on 15 April 1960 prior to the formation of the ELF (Fadab, 1994: 75). However, Idris Mohammed Adem, founding member and first chairman of the ELF, in an interview,<sup>31</sup> did not mention he was a member of the ELM. To the contrary, he explained that he already had in his thinking the idea of waging armed struggle as the sole solution for the Eritrean problem. Therefore, he strove towards the formation of the ELF in July 1960 in Cairo.<sup>32</sup>

However, Fadab (1994) explained that on 20 August 1960 the ELM invited Idris Mohammed Adem for a meeting in Port Sudan to discuss unity between the two organizations. Idris Mohammed Adem accepted the invitation and proposed a name for the desired united

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<sup>31</sup> Idris Mohsmmed Adem interview with Gunter Schroeder on 15 March 1989, Khartoum, Sudan.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

organizations to be called *Al-Harakat Al-Shabiya LiJabhat Tahrir Eritrea*, (translated: Popular Movement of the Eritrean Liberation Front).

By the time Osman Saleh Sabbe (a key figure to be discussed later) arrived in Port Sudan for a purpose of opening a branch of the ELF in Port Sudan, the ELM took the opportunity to meet him. The meeting took place on 20 March 1962. The agenda set by the ELM was to talk about finalizing issues regarding the process of unity between the two organizations. Osman Saleh Sabbe did not accept the proposal of unity between the two organizations. Therefore, the ELM's attempt to reach an agreement with Osman Saleh Sabbe failed (Fadab, 1994: 70).

After the Sudanese revolution in October 1964, a Sudanese initiative of friendship with the Eritrean case, composed of Murqhani Al-Nasir and Daltun Abdallah, attempted to mediate between the two organizations (ELM and ELF). The ELM delegation, composed of Woldeab Woldemariyam, Mohammed Saleh Mahmoud, and Tahir Ibrahim Fadab, arrived in Khartoum for the meeting. Osman Saleh Sabbe and Idris Osman Gelawdeous – both ELF leaders – who were in Khartoum by then, sent a letter of rejection and departed Sudan (ibid).

Three reasons can be identified behind the conflict between the ELM and the ELF. The first was the difference in *modus operandi*. The ELM applied peaceful means of resistance while the ELF waged an armed struggle. The second reason was that the ELF did not consider the ELM as a viable organization to unite with, instead it decided to liquidate it (Fadab, 1996). The third reason was that the ELF leadership did not accept the 'communist' background of some of the ELM leaders (Markakis, 1987: 107). The disagreement resulted in a restructuring of the ELM part of which was forming an armed wing.

According to Fadab (1994), the ELM General Command called its members for an urgent meeting, which was held on 20 July 1965 in Port Sudan. The purpose of the meeting was to restructure the organization. One of the measures taken was forming a military wing and change the peaceful resistance into an armed resistance. On 25 July 1965, the ELM managed

to get some weapons from the Sudanese Communist Party and formed its military wing composed of a group from its members. However, on 9 August 1965, an ELF squad ambushed the ELM's armed group in a place called *Eilla Tsaada* - in northern Eritrea – and killed four key military men of the ELM's group. The killed men were Muhayedin Ali, Mohammed Saleh Ali, Idris Mahmoud, and Ali Mahmoud. (Fadab, 1994: 79).

Prior to the 1965 attempt of starting an armed resistance by the ELM, there was an attempt by members of Eritrean police to launch similar armed resistance. The attempt took place at the end of 1962 in opposition to Ethiopia's encroachment to annexing Eritrea into Ethiopia. According to Mohammed Saeed Nawud, the police initiative was organized by ELM members in the police. A group of sixteen police members agreed to take the responsibility of initiating the armed resistance. To that end, several police members cooperated in an operation of smuggling weapons from Massawa police station. The weapon-smuggle-operation was accomplished successfully, and the weapons were delivered to the devotees, who awaited in a place called "*Hadleet*" in northern Dankalia, about 50 km from Massawa. However, the Ethiopian military forces received information about the whereabouts of the group and went out after the group. In a place called *Saaytu*, northern Dankalia, a battle ensued between the Ethiopian army and the group of Eritrean police, who went in rebellion. According to Nawud (1996: 222-223), the Eritrean armed group lost its key leader whose name was Qamhad Idris. Nine members of the group were also captured by the Ethiopian forces while the rest scattered and joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Markakis (1987: 109), puts the number of the Eritrean police who took up arms "thirty (30)" and that they were "wiped out" by Ethiopian forces. Markakis (1987: 109) claim was incorrect. According to the leaders of the ELM, such as Nawud (1996) and Fadab (1994), although the police who took up arms lost some of their members including their key leader but were not "wiped out". They joined the ELF.

It can be inferred that, the ELM served as a transformation bridge from the political situation during the 1940s to the start of armed struggle in early 1960s. As is discussed in chapter four, the political situation of Eritrea during the 1940 was identified by the struggle for independence on the one hand and for unity with Ethiopia on the other. The political power struggle during the 1940s was tense that sometimes it took a form of religious divide though both the independence and unionist blocs did have members from different religions. As explained above, the members of the ELM were from different tribal, regional, and religious backgrounds. More importantly, most of them were new generation in the Eritrean politics and most of them joined the ELF (Nawud, 1996; Fadab, 1994).

### **6.3 The Formation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)**

In this study the formation of the ELF is divided into two phases. They are categorized as the first phase formation and the second phase formation. The first phase formation begun in July 1960. It was the formation of a political organization, as structure, and choosing a name for it. The name chosen was the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).<sup>33</sup> The second phase formation was the official start of the War of independence on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1961. According to explanations from the veterans who formed the ELF, such as Idris Mohammed Adem,<sup>34</sup> three socio-political groups from the Eritrean societies were involved in both phases of formation of the ELF. The three groups were former veteran political leaders from the 1940s nationalist movements, exiled students based in Cairo, and Eritrean soldiers who served in the Sudan Military Forces (SMF).

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<sup>33</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem in an interview with Gunter Schroeder, 15 March 1989, Khartoum

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

At the end of 1950s, two prominent Eritrean former political leaders of the 1940s and 1950s arrived in Cairo. They were called Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem. The former was the leader of an Eritrean political party called in Arabic “*Al RabiTa Al Islamiya Al Eritrea*” translated in English, “the Eritrean Muslim League (EML)” that was formed in 1946 (Tesfai, 2001: 187-189). The members of the EML were mainly Muslims. Prior to being a prominent leader in the EML and well-known advocate of Eritrean independence, Ibrahim Sultan was a vehement advocate for the emancipation of Serfs particularly in the Senhit and Sahil provinces of Eritrea where he hailed from. The social system identified by Serfs vs Chieftain divide had prevailed in several areas of Eritrean lowlands before the Italian colonialism of Eritrea. Ibrahim Sultan belonged to one of many Tigre speaking tribal groups in Eritrea. With the political developments in Eritrea under the British Military Administration, Ibrahim Sultan took his struggle for serf emancipation to a further level of national struggle for Eritrea’s independence (ibid).

Idris Mohammed Adem had served as president of the Eritrean Assembly from July 1955 for a short period of time. Idris Mohammed Adem hailed from a Beni-Aamer tribe of western lowlands of Eritrea. What led both leaders to flee Eritrea was the growing insecurity due to political unrest created by the deteriorating federal system. The deteriorating federal system and continuous violation of the arrangement by Ethiopia led many prominent Eritrean leaders to resign from their positions and/or depart the country for exile. Therefore, Idris Mohammed Adem and Ibrahim Sultan left Eritrea for the Sudan in March 1959.<sup>35</sup>

Another veteran of Eritrean politics who arrived in Cairo was Woldeab Woldemariam. He departed Eritrea earlier than both Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem and arrived in Cairo in 1954. (Markakis, 1987: 109). Woldeab Woldemariam escaped several bomb attacks on attempts to kill him because of his advocate for Eritrea’s independence. He was a well-

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<sup>35</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem in an interview with Gunter Schroeder, 15 March 1989, Khartoum

known journalist and politician of his time. The arrival in Cairo of these three veteran politicians contributed immensely to the first phase formation of the ELF. Woldeab Woldemariam had been engaged in broadcasting a radio program in Tigrinya language from Cairo. Together with Woldeab there was another Eritrean called Safi Imam Musa who broadcasted in Arabic language. Safi Imam Musa was one of the exiled Eritrean students in Cairo. The radio broadcast attracted attention of many Eritreans and contributed greatly into sensationalizing Eritrean nationalism. The broadcast lasted from March 1956 to the beginning of 1957. Egypt granted the broadcast in response to Ethiopia's stand against Egypt during the 1956 crisis of internationalization of the Suez Canal (Markakis, 1987: 110).

The second Eritrean socio-political group, which contributed to the formation of the ELF was composed of exiled Eritrean students in Cairo. According to Abdulkader Hagos,<sup>36</sup> one of the exiled Eritreans since early 1950s, from early 1950s Eritrean students who pursued their studies in Cairo had formed clubs where they met and discussed issues of concern. For example, in 1950, eighteen Eritrean students formed a charitable organization in Cairo. In January 1952, the Eritrean students' club in Cairo composed of 81 members was opened. The Eritrean students' club in Cairo would later to play crucial role in paving way to the first and second phases formation of the ELF. Many of its members would also emerge as prominent leaders of the ELF.

The third Eritrean socio-political group that contributed to the formation of the ELF was composed of Eritreans who served as soldiers in the Sudanese Armed Forces in Sudan. According to Mohammed Ali Idris (aka Abu Rujeala),<sup>37</sup> there were many Eritreans who lived

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<sup>36</sup> Abdulkader Hagos who was a founding member of both the charitable organization and the student club wrote in his memoir how they – the Eritrean students – developed the ideas of forming the organization and the club. His memoir is written in Arabic: “*Zikriyati Aan dawr Al Harakat Tulabiya li abnaa Eritrea fi Masir* (Translated: My memories of the role of Eritrean students in Egypt)”, Pp. 11 - 18, Unpublished Paper. See also

<sup>37</sup> Mohammed Ali Idris (aka Abu Rujeala), one of the soldiers in the Sudanese Army, narrated about how the Eritreans joined the Sudanese Defence Forces and how they later formed network to partake in the Eritrean armed struggle. His unpublished memoir in Arabic titled “*Min zikriyat Mohammed Ali Idris Abu Rujeala*. (My translation: From the memories of Mohammed Ali Idris Abu Rujeala)”

in Sudan for various reasons. Of whom were those who joined the Sudanese Military Forces. Many of them had kept in close contacts with their families in Eritrea and therefore they were aware of the political situation in Eritrea. With the deterioration of the Federal arrangement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, they discussed their worries regarding the future of Eritrea. When the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) launched its underground movement as early as 1956, several of the Eritreans in the Sudanese Military Forces were recruited into the ELM secret structures. Later, some of them formed their own network and discussed on how to contribute towards struggle of solving the Eritrean problem.<sup>38</sup>

The three socio-political groups from the Eritrean societies (exiled students, former veteran political leaders, and soldiers in the Sudanese Defense Forces) had shared understanding that Ethiopia's violation of the federal arrangement meant a declaration of Eritrean annexation to Ethiopia. Most members of the groups were either recruited into the ELM secret structures or at least they were aware of its activities.<sup>39</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem claimed that he had already contacts with some of the Eritrean soldiers in the Sudanese Military Forces, as well as with some of the exiled students in Cairo.<sup>40</sup> Mohammed Ali Idris (aka Abu Rujeala) also explained that he and some of his friends had contacts with Idris Mohammed Adem and discussed the issue of launching armed struggle. It was also easier for Idris Mohammed Adem to communicate with the students in Cairo as he was younger in his age than Ibrahim Sultan. As a former chairman of the Eritrean Assembly, Idris Mohammed Adem was also a known politician in the circles of the former veteran political leaders. Therefore, he emerged as the key leader among the three groups.

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<sup>38</sup> Mohammed Ali Idris (aka Abu Rujeala), one of the soldiers in the Sudanese Army, narrated about how the Eritreans joined the Sudanese Defence Forces and how they later formed network to partake in the Eritrean armed struggle. His unpublished memoir in Arabic titled "*Min zikriyat Mohammed Ali Idris Abu Rujeala*. (My translation: From the memories of Mohammed Ali Idris Abu Rujeala)"

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem interview with Gunter Schroeder on 15 March 1989, Khartoum, Sudan.



## 6.4 The First Phase Formation of the ELF

The first phase formation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was a preparatory stage for launching the Eritrean armed struggle. It involved interactions between the three Eritrean socio-political groups explained above. The students who arrived in Cairo earlier than the veteran politicians played an important role in facilitating the way forward towards the first phase formation of the ELF. According to Abdulkader Hagos, they had already started different types of campaigns aiming to introduce Eritrea to the Arab and Muslim World. They wrote letters to Egyptian Authorities regarding Ethiopia's violation of the Federal arrangement. They published and distributed written materials, organized seminars, and attended international gatherings of various nationalist movements.<sup>41</sup>

The exiled Eritrean Students based in Cairo sought to encourage the former veteran politicians such as Ibrahim Sultan, Woldeab Woldemariyam, and Idris Mohammed Adem. However, only Idris Mohammed Adem agreed on the idea of forming an armed struggle. In August 1960, they held their first meeting of forming the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and selected a Provincial executive Committee of the ELF (Markakis, 1987: 110; Dandan, 1996: 45-46). In the first meeting of the ELF, Idris Mohammed Adem was elected the chairman and Idris Osman Glawdeous his deputy. There were about ten founding members who attended the meeting.<sup>42</sup> A document (referred to as ELF constitution) was drafted highlighting ELF's goal of achieving independence through the armed struggle. (Markakis, 1987: 110; Dandan, 1995:

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<sup>41</sup> Abdulkader Hagos who was a founding member of both the charitable organization and the student club wrote in his memoir how they – the Eritrean students – developed the ideas of forming the organization and the club. His memoir is written in Arabic: “*Zikriyati Aan dawr Al Harakat Tulabiya li abnaa Eritrea fi Masir* (Translated: My memories of the role of Eritrean students in Egypt)”, Pp. 22 - 23

<sup>42</sup> According to Osman Saleh Dandan (1996: 46), the founding members of the ELF who attended the first meeting were, (1) Mohammed Saleh Humed (2) Ibrahim Idris Ahmed (3) Saeed Hussein (4) Idris Osman Glawdeous (5) Taha Mohammednur (6) Saeed Ahmed Mohammed Hashim (7) Osman Ibrahim Bishi (8) Adem Akti (9) Mohammed Saeed Antata (10) Mohammed Saeed Ahmadeen

46). Some of those students, who were founding members of the ELF, would later emerge as key leaders of the ELF.

In December 1960, Idris Mohammed Adem and Ibrahim Sultan visited Saudi Arabia – Riyadh –for the purpose of mobilizing support for the case of Eritrea. They met with Crown Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia, who advised them to appeal to the UN. However, disagreement between Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem ensued. Ibrahim Sultan advocated for peaceful resistance while Idris Mohammed Adem advocated for an armed struggle.<sup>43</sup> Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem had a long-standing political rift. Ibrahim Sultan was the founder of the Eritrean Muslim League political party, which was a major independence bloc during the 1940s. Idris Mohammed Adem was one of the key figures in the splinter party from the Muslim League at the end of 1940s, which was known as Muslim League of Western Eritrea. Later during the mid-1950s Idris Mohammed Adem also served as a chairperson of the Eritrean Assembly. When both Ibrahim and Idris arrived in Cairo in March 1959, their political rift continued. But now the disagreement was about the *modus operandi* of the Eritrean struggle against the violation of the Federal arrangement. Therefore, after their first joint visit to Saudi Arabia, they could not continue together; therefore, Idris Mohammed Adem went on his own path.<sup>44</sup>

In the situation where Idris Mohammed Adem and some of the exiled Eritrean students in Cairo continued discussing the formation of an organization, Osman Saleh Sabbe, a former School headmaster from a place called Hergigo in the Red Sea region of Eritrea, appeared on the scene, and became a key role player. Idris Mohammed Adem, in his second tour to Saudi Arabia (Jeddah), met with Osman Saleh Sabbe. In their meeting, Osman Saleh Sabbe would agree to join the struggle. Both Idris Mohammed Adem and Osman Saleh Sabbe would then steer the wheel of the ELF. In their first move in early 1961, they visited Somalia for a purpose

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<sup>43</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem in an interview with Gunter Schroeder, 15 March 1989, Khartoum, Sudan

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

of getting some support. They received warm welcome and were able to secure some assistance. In February 1961, they opened an office in Somalia under a name “Eritrean Somali Friendship Society” and were granted Somali diplomatic passports.<sup>45</sup>

Idris Mohammed Adem explained that he, together with Osman Saleh Sabbe, toured many Middle Eastern countries seeking support to the nascent ELF. In Jordan they met king Hussein. In Kuwait they met with Prince Al Sabah and the country’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. They, then, continued their tour for support and visited Bahrain, Lebanon, and Syria. Although all the countries promised to support them one way or the other, it was the government of Syria, which allowed the nascent ELF to open office in its country. Besides, the government of Syria was the first to provide weapons and gave military training to some members of the ELF.<sup>46</sup>

The third socio-political group, which contributed to linking the first phase formation of the ELF to the second phase formation was the group of Eritreans who served in the Sudanese Military Forces. As explained by Mohammed Ali Idris (aka Abu Rujeala), the soldiers had formed their own Eritrean network while still in the Sudanese Military Forces. The reason behind forming their own network was dissatisfaction with the ELM. The secrecy and vagueness of ELM’s structures and the peaceful resistance *modus operandi* ELM pursued to achieve Eritrean independence appeared problematic and unworkable to them. They then distanced themselves from the ELM and sought for an alternative way of struggle. The alternative was to wage an armed struggle from within Eritrea. They identified a person who was fit for the responsibility of firing the first bullet and lead the war. The person identified to have had the aimed military skills and experience was called Hamid Idris Awate. To connect with Hamid Idris Awate, who was in Eritrea, and convince him to shoulder the responsibility was not easy. They approached a well-known and dignified religious and tribal leader called

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

Muhammad shaikh Dawud. He was the grandson of Sayidna Mustafa, a well revered and respected religious leader. There is a village named after his name: the village of Sayidna Mustafa. It is located close to the town of Agordat in the Barka region.<sup>47</sup>

Hamid Idris Awate was born in 1915 in western lowlands of Eritrea. In 1934 he was recruited in the Italian colonial army as a local soldier known as *askari*, an Arabic/Turkish word for a soldier. As an Italian *askari*, Awate went into several military campaigns the Italians conducted during their colonial expansion in the horn of Africa.<sup>48</sup> In 1941 the Italian army was defeated by British imperial army, which had been a colonial power in the region long before the Italians arrived during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When war ensued between the two colonial powers, the Italians lost the war. Therefore, the Eritrean *askaris* – as part of the defeated Italian army – were dispersed. Hamid Idris Awate, in disagreement with the British Military Administration, went to the bush and fought against the British till 1951.<sup>49</sup> In 1952, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia through the UN Resolution 390A (V). During the 1950s, there were several attempts to disarm Awate. Simultaneously, Awate would not isolate himself from the growing political activities and movements for Eritrean independence.<sup>50</sup>

Idris Muhammed Adem in an interview claims Awate was in contact with him while still the chairman of the Eritrean Assembly.<sup>51</sup> Awate told Idris Mohammed Adem about the deteriorating political situation in Eritrea. After Idris Mohammed Adem left the Eritrean Assembly in June 1956, he met with Awate in Agordat and discussed about going to the mountains (waging war). Idris Mohammed Adem advised Awate to refrain from rushing. However, after Idris Mohammed Adem arrived in Cairo he learnt that Awate made contacts

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<sup>47</sup> Mohammed Ali Idris (aka Abu Rujeala), one of the soldiers in the Sudanese Army, unpublished memoir in Arabic titled “*Min zikriyat Mohammed Ali Idris Abu Rujeala*. (My translation: From the memories of Mohammed Ali Idris Abu Rujeala)”

<sup>48</sup> Veteran freedom fighter, Ibrahim Totil, “The Eritrean Revolution”, unpublished paper, Pp. 31 - 32

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem in an interview he gave to Gunter Schroeder, 15 March 1989, Khartoum, Sudan

with Mohammed Shaikh Dawud, who in his turn was approached by the Eritrean soldiers in the Sudanese Military Forces.

Therefore, the next step was to establish link with Hamid Idris Awate and enter the second phase formation of the ELF. It would be a transfer of the political first phase formation to the desired armed resistance formation. The name ELF was also endorsed as an identification of the second formation. The efforts of the three Eritrean socio-political groups, as explained above, now with the official launch of the war on 1 September 1961 entered its second phase.

## **6.5 The Second Phase Formation of the ELF**

The second phase formation of the ELF was the process through which an armed wing was established, and the structure of the political leadership took shape. Hamid Idris Awate accompanied by few followers went out to the mountains on 1 September 1961. Therefore, the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1961 is marked as the launch of the war for Eritrea's independence. It also marked the emergence of Eritrean rebel forces for resistance against Ethiopia's violation of Eritrea's right to self-determination. In March 1962, Eritreans who served in the Sudanese Military Forces would join the armed resistance in Eritrea.<sup>52</sup> At that stage, the small nascent armed force was composed of two groups headed by Awate. The first group was those who accompanied and joined Awate from the local population. The second group was composed of those Eritreans who served in the Sudanese Defence Forces. Awate assigned his deputy and military commanders from amongst the former Sudanese soldiers. However, Hamid Idris Awate died of diseases on 18 April 1962, one month after the former Sudanese soldiers joined

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<sup>52</sup> According to Dandan (1995: 53), among those who joined Awate in March 1962 were 1) Omar Hamid Izaz 2) Mohammed Idris Haj 3) Mohammed Omar Abdalla (Abu Tayara) 4) Osman Abu Shanab 5) Adem Mohammed Hamed Gundifel 6) Jumie Adem 7) Omar Damer 8) Kubub Hajaj 9) Muhammed Adem Idris Arey (Geseer) 10) Mohammed Ali Abu Rujeala 11) Mohammed Ibrahim Bahduray.

him.<sup>53</sup> His deputy Mohammed Idris Haj took the leadership position. However, he also died in a battle on 13 January 1963. Later, another former Sudanese soldier named Tahir Salim took the Military Head position in the field (Izaz, 2016: 32-33).

On the other side, the political leadership that was formed during the first phase formation in exile, in Cairo, continued its leadership. The political leadership considered itself as the core leadership of the ELF. After the political leadership learnt that Awate went out to the mountains, it involved itself in fundraising campaigns and search for weapons to be provided to the armed group inside Eritrea. At this stage, the political leadership in exile was dominated by three personalities. They were Idris Mohammed Adem, Idris Osman Glawdeous, and Osman Saleh Sabbe. That way, a dual leadership structure was formed. They were the military commanders inside Eritrea and the political leadership in exile. In the process, the dual leadership created communication inconvenience. Therefore, the political leadership came up with an idea of establishing a third structure to serve as a facilitator between the leadership in exile and the military commanders inside Eritrea. The third structure was an office set in Kassala, eastern Sudan. The office was called Revolutionary Command (RC).<sup>54</sup>

With the formation of the Revolutionary Command, the leadership structure took trio form. However, power concentration lied only at the hands of the political leadership in exile and the military leadership inside Eritrea. The political leadership in exile, which was known as the Supreme Council (SC), assumed core leadership of the ELF. Personal accounts<sup>55</sup> of veterans of the EWI explain that the activities of the SC focused on regional and international support seeking campaigns. It sought support through awareness campaigns about the Eritrean struggle for independence. It covered the Arab and the Muslim World. It also covered as far as

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<sup>53</sup> Ibrahim Totil, "The Eritrean Revolution", unpublished paper - Pp. 58 – 59.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Some of the veterans of the EWI include Mohammed Osman Izaz (2016, Pp. 32 – 33); Ibrahim Totil, "The Eritrean Revolution", unpublished paper, Pp. 77 – 78. Also taken from the interviews I conducted with veteran freedom fighters, 1) Mohammedberhan Belata. Intervire conducted 17 March 2021. 2) veteran freedom fighter, Mohammed Nugus Bahta. Interview conducted 25 July 2021

the Far East countries, such as China. The SC controlled the diplomatic mission through which it accessed financial and military support. Although in the beginning of its launch, the armed group in the field heavily relied on the local population for its food and cloths, whatever supply comes from outside the country was provided through the channels of the SC. Therefore, the SC became the main source of all sorts of supplies to the armed group in the field.

In this study, the second phase formation of the ELF is identified to have lasted from the start of the war on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1961 to the formation of Zonal administrative commands (to be explained below) and a trio leadership structure (the SC, RC, and the Field Commands), which took shape in 1965-66. During the second phase formation, Syria became the first country, which recognized the EWI and provided with different types of assistance. Among the support was providing military and political training to the Eritrean freedom fighters. In 1963/64, a first batch of Eritrean freedom fighters received military training in Syria. The trainees were volunteers from the exiled Eritrean students in Cairo. Some of the students who received military training in the first batch were Mohammed Ali Omaru, Mohammed Saeed Shamsi, Ramadan MohammedNur, and Abdulkareem Ahmed. These volunteer trainees later emerged as the new generation of leadership in the ELF.<sup>56</sup>

Syria also provided the ELF with weapons. In March 1965, Syria provided the ELF with two planes loaded with weapons weighing 60 tons. On 26 March the two planes landed in Jeddah, and then proceeded to Khartoum. From Khartoum the weapons were transported and stored in a place near Khartoum, but about 30 tonnes of the weapons was caught by Sudanese security before being transported to the field in Eritrea (Izaz, 2016: 37-41). Two of the veterans<sup>57</sup> of the EWI who I conducted interviews with, explained that during the second phase formation of the ELF the number of volunteers joining the ELF increased significantly. Many

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> The two veterans I conducted interview with are (1) Mohammedberhan Belata who joined the armed struggle in early 1964. Interview was conducted on 08 March 2021. (2) Mohammed Nugus Bahta who joined the armed struggle in late 1962. Interview was conducted on 25 July 2021.

more received military trainings in Syria and brought military skills to the field. Weapons started to flow that improved the fighting capability of the ELF. Altogether, changes in size, military capability, and emergence of new leaders forced the current leadership to re-structure the organization (ELF).

The biggest re-structuring was the formation of the Zonal Commands. It is an idea of dividing the Eritrean armed forces into autonomous administrative territories. The idea of dividing the military structure inside Eritrea into Zonal Commands was an emulation from the Algerian Nationalist Movement known as Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN). The FLN partook in the war for Algerian independence that lasted from 1954 to 1962. The FLN army was divided into six military zonal (territorial) commands. The Zonal Command structure – as a model - worked for the Algerians. To that end, the ELF leadership (the Supreme Council) decided to apply the model to the military wing inside Eritrea. (Markakis, 1987: 113).

On 20 July 1965, the formation of four Zonal Commands – to be applied inside Eritrea – was ratified. The four zones were identified as First Zone, Second Zone, Third Zone, and Fourth Zone. Geographically, the First Zone covered the provinces of Barka and Gash-Setit in Western Lowlands of Eritrea. The Second Zond covered the provinces of Senhit and Sahil in North-West of Eritrea. The Third Zone covered the provinces of Akelguzay and Seraye in the Highlands of Eritrea. The Fourth Zone covered the provinces of Semhar and Dankalia in the Red Sea region of Eritrea. A year later, in 1966, a Fifth Zone was formed. It covered the province of Hamassein in the Highlands of Eritrean. Each Zone was made to have seven leadership positions: 1) Head Commander 2) Vice Head Commander 3) Political Commissar 4) Security Head 5) Head of Finance & Logistics 6) Head of Medical Care 7) Head of Guerrilla Commando. (Izaz, 2016: 45-49). The leaders who were assigned to the position of the “head commander” were natives of the given geographical areas. The head commanders were composed of two different backgrounds. The First Zone and the Second Zone Head



Commanders were from the former Sudanese Military Forces. The Third Zone and the Fourth Zone Head Commanders were younger generation who were members of the exiled Eritrean students in Cairo and amongst those who received military and political training in Syria. Background difference between the former Sudanese soldiers and the students who took military and political training abroad became part of the crisis within the ELF (Izaz, 2016: 70-75; Markakis, 1987: 114-115).<sup>58</sup>

In this study, the formation of the Zonal Commands is identified as the end of the second phase formation of the ELF and a transformation into an era of internal crisis. The Zonal Commands were autonomous regional structures. Each Zone had an autonomy of deciding on matters of the military, economy, and administration. Each Zone also administered mobilizing of resources that involved collecting monetary and material contributions from local population. The issue of resources mobilization at times clashed with the mandate of the Revolutionary Command (RC), which was in Kassala, Sudan. The Chain-of-command between the Supreme Council, the Revolutionary command, and the Field Commands did not hold. Some of the zonal commands bypassed the Revolutionary Command and established a direct link with the Supreme Council. The link between the Zonal Commands and the Supreme Council was based on regional affinity and parochialism. The three key leaders of the Supreme Council – Idris Mohammed Adem, Idris Glawdeous, and Osman Salek Sabbe - hailed from three different regions in Eritrea. Idris Mohammed Adem hailed from the Barka region of Western Lowlands, Idris Glawdeous from the Senhit-Sahel region, and Osman Saleh Sabbe from the Red Sea region. The First Zone was linked with Idris Mohammed Adem. The Second Zone was linked with Idris Glawdeous. The Fourth Zone was linked with Osman Saleh Sabbe.

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<sup>58</sup> According to interviews I conducted with Mohammedberhan Belata, Mohammed Nugus Bahta and according to Izaz (2016: 70-75) and Markakis (1987: 114-115), the First Zone was headed by Mahmoud Dinai, who hailed from the region. The Second Zone was headed by Omar Izaz, who hailed from the region. The Third Zone was headed by Abdelkareem Ahmed, who hailed from the region. The Fourth Zone was headed by Mohammed Ali Omaru, who hailed from the region. The Fifth Zone was headed by Wolday Kahsay, who hailed from the region.)

The Third Zone and the Fifth Zone were not linked because the three key figures of the Supreme Council were from other regions. (Markakis, 1987: 115; Pool, 2001: 51-52).

The result of the structural dynamics was a failure of the Zonal Command as a viable structure. The trio-structure - the Supreme Council, the Zonal Commands, and the Revolutionary Council – did not hold onto the chain-of-command that was supposed to ease functional complications within the ELF as an organization. Several developments occurred that marked internal crisis of the ELF. According to Mohammedberhan Belata,<sup>59</sup> Major developments included power sharing grievances and insecurity by minority groups during the given period. Assigning positions in the formed structures raised some grievances amongst minority tribal groups. New members from different religious backgrounds – mainly Christians – felt marginalized and complained of being deliberately assassinated by the security squads of the ELF.

The crisis led to an emergence of a reformist group composed mainly of new generation of emerging leadership in the Field. Several attempts were made to identify the problems and bring about change. One issue of concern of the reformists was how to unify the five Zonal Commands under one central command. However, miscommunications and misunderstandings among the Zonal Commands, the Revolutionary Command and the Supreme Council did not help reach a solution. Therefore, an implosion of the ELF became unavoidable.

## **6.6 The Implosion of the ELF**

The implosion of the ELF started when internal problems went out of control. The era of the Zonal Commands that lasted from 1965 to 1968 involved the developments towards the

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<sup>59</sup> I conducted interview with veteran freedom fighter Mohammedberhan Belata. Interview conducted on 08 March 2021

implosion. The major development was the emergence of a reformist movement known as “*eslah* translated: reform” within the ELF. At the core of the reformist movement were the new generation, who came from academic background and who received military and political training abroad. They were more ambitious in their political views than the former Sudanese soldiers who had dominated the Field leadership. The new generation came from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds as is explained below and in the next chapter.

Most of the reformist were of those who joined the ELF in 1966 and 1967. The reformist Movement emerged as a response to the failure of the Zonal Commands in creating a cohesive nationalist struggle. Some of the issues raised were unity of the army, leadership should be in the field not abroad, and respect the rights of the Eritrean masses where the ELF controlled. (Connel, 2005: 48-49; Izaz, 2016: 55). The movement was led by a group that was known as “committee of reform”.<sup>60</sup> From around mid-1967, the reformists started contacting and convincing fighters in all the Zonal Commands and members outside the military structures. They called for a need of a comprehensive meeting to discuss and rectify the problems posed by the zonal command structure. The issues the “committee of reform” raised included leadership failure and unviability of the Zonal Command structure in transforming the ELF into an inclusive and stronger organization (Izaz, 2016: 55; Mohammed Ali, 2010: 46-47; Markakis, 1987: 122-123).

The idea was compelling to those who had grievances regarding power sharing and those who complained about religious persecution by the security squads of the organization. It was also compelling to those who received political and military training in China and were deployed as political commissars of the Zonal Commands in mid-1968. (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 23-25; Killion, 1998: 207-208; Markakis, 1987: 123). By the mid-1968 the reformist movement

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<sup>60</sup> According to Izaz (2016, p. 55), the “reform committee” was composed of Hamid Hussein Ali, Saeed Sabir, Abdelkader Ramadan Shaikh, Abdalla Suleiman, Hassan Bashemeal, Mohammed Osman Izaz, Osman Hassen Ibrahim (Aajeeb), Musa Radaay, Saeed Dawud, Idris Abdalla Idris, and Saleh Gulboob,

was preparing to convene the first meeting, and the China trainees joined the conveners. Prominent of those who received training in China were Isaias Afwerki and Ramadan Mohammednur, both would later emerge as powerful leaders during the latter part of the war for independence.

The reformist movement in its initial steps proposed a convention of the military to discuss an issue of forming a central command to lead the military inside Eritrea and the rest of the ELF structures outside Eritrea. Their proposal included drafting a clear programme to guide an inclusive revolutionary struggle. It also included a convention of a congress to come up with a political and military programme that would enable the accomplishment of the goals of the revolution. (Izaz, 2016: 55). The first meeting was held from 14 to 16 June 1968 at place called Aradie in the Barka region. The First Zone, the Second Zone, the Third Zone, and the Fourth Zone were each represented by head commander and political commissar. Mahmoud Dinai, Musa Mohammed Hashim; Omar Hamed Izaz, Moahmood Ibrahim MohammedSaeed; Abdelkareem Ahmed, Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim; and, Mohammed Ali Omaru, Ramadan Mohammednur; respectively. (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 26-27; Dandan, 1996: 88-89; Markakis, 1987: 124-125). The Fifth Zone was represented by Isias Afwerki (political commissar) and Abdalla Idris Mohammed (a platoon commander in the Fifth Zone). Head commander of the Fifth Zone was Wolday Kahsay, who was in a trip to Sudan during the Aredaib meeting. Wolday Kahsay never returned from his trip to Sudan. He later handed over himself to the Ethiopian embassy in Khartoum (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 31). Wolday Kahsay was replaced by Abraham Tewelde. Additional attendees were, Omar Mohammed Damer (head military training), Abdalla Idris Drar (deputy head military training), and Mohammed Omar Abdallah Abu-Tayara (head assistant forces) (Dandan, 1995: 99). Neither the Revolutionary Command nor the Supreme Council attended the meeting.

The Aredaib meeting made it clear that the Field commanders started taking things into their own hands. The two main structures – the Supreme Council and the Revolutionary Command – were made to stay aside. In the meeting, the attendees agreed: 1) to convene a wider congress where all Zonal Commanders and political leaders to attend. 2) The Revolutionary Command to disband its Kassala office and merge itself with the Field military structure. And the conveners divided among themselves the task of preparing the intended second meeting (ibid). The second meeting was convened from 11 to 18 September 1968 in a place called Orota in the Senhit region. In the meeting attended representatives from the Third Zone, the Fourth Zone, and the Fifth Zone. The remaining two Zones – the First Zone and the Second Zone – could not attend due to war situation occurred in an area called halhal where the Second Zone was situated (Mohamed Ali, 2010: 49; Izaz, 2016: 102; Abdalla Idris, 2016: 28-29).

In this study, the Orota meeting (aka the Anseba meeting) is identified as a historic turn whereby the Zonal Command structure was disbanded, and the three zones declared unity. The unity was known as a tripartite unity (in its Arabic term: *wuhda sulasiya*). The unified structure to be commanded by a temporary revolutionary command composed of twelve leaders elected from amongst the representatives of the attended three Zonal Commands. (Mohammed Ali, 2010: 51; Abdalla Idris, 2016: 29-30; Izaz, 2016: 102; Markakis, 1987: 124-125).<sup>61</sup> In the meeting, it was also decided not to recognize the Revolutionary Command in Kassala. Another important decision was the plan to organize a congress where the remaining two Zonal Commands – the First Zone and the Second Zone – to join the Tripartite unity and form a united ELF (ibid).

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<sup>61</sup> According to Mohammed Ali (2010: 51); Abdalla Idris, (2016: 29-30); Izaz (2016: 102); Markakis (1987: 124-125), the 12 elected leaders were: 1) Mohammed Ahmed Abdu 2) Mohammed Ali Omaru 3) Abraham Tewelde 4) Abdalla Idris Mohammed 5) Isaias Afwerki 6) Mohammed Omar Abdalla Abu Tayara 7) Ahmed Ibrahim secreter 8) Mohammed Abdalla Safi 9) Omar Damer 10) Ramadan Mohammednur 11) Abdalla Yousef 12) Hamed Saleh

According to the plan, the next meeting (referred to as “the military congress of Adobha”) was conducted from 10 to 25 August 1969 in a place called Adobha in the Sahel region. The meeting was decisive to the future of the ELF as an organization. In the meeting, 160 delegates from the Zonal Commands and the rest of the structures of the organization attended. The agenda of the meeting included electing General Command to lead the ELF. One of the main problems occurred when dealing with the procedure of the election which was an issue of representation. An idea to ban the head commanders of the Zones and their deputies from being elected in the new structure led to a heated debate. Some of the head commanders rejected the idea of excluding the head commanders and their deputies. However, many of the attendees supported the idea and it was applied (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 31). Another important aspect of the representation debacle was the quota of representation. The agreement reached was 18 places for Tripartite Union Group, and the First Zone and the Second Zone would be given 10 places each (Izaz, 2016: 60). As it is noted above, the First Zone and the Second Zone did not attend the Orotta meeting where the three Zones declared unity. Now they claimed more places than the three units. The tripartite unity decided not to impede the progress of the congress and accepted smaller number of places of representation (ibid).

At the end of the Adobha military congress, a 38-member Provisional General Command was established.<sup>62</sup> Besides, the resolution of the congress included: the abolishment of the Zonal Commands, re-structuring of the armed forces, assigning a committee to prepare a comprehensive congress of the ELF to be held within a year, a call was made that the Supreme

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<sup>62</sup> According to the interview I conducted with Mohammedberhan Belata and personal accounts by Abdalla Idris Mohammed (2016, p. 24) and Ibrahim Mohammed Ali (2010, p. 69), the elected leaders were, 1) Mohammed Ahmed Abdu 2) Abdalla Idris Mohammed 3) Mohammed Osman Izaz 4) Saleh Fikak 5) Saleh Faraj Ali 6) Saleh Ibrahim Jemjam 7) Yaseen Al Haj 8) Ibrahim Mahmoud 9) Mohammedberhan Belata 10) Abdalla Mahmoud 11) Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim secreter 12) Ahmed Ibrahim Mohammed 13) Ramadan Mohammednur 14) Tesfay Tekhle Gebrekidan 15) Adem Saleh Shedelee 16) Saleh Saiyd Hayotee 17) Ahmed Adem Omer 18) Saeed Saleh Mohammed 19) Abdelkader Ramadan Ali 20) Ibrahim Abdalla 21) Taher Aamer Shihabi 22) Abdalraqueeb Mohammed Musa 23) Mohammed Ahmed Idris 24) Jaafar Jaber Omer 25) Ibrahim Jemeal 26) Isaias Afwerki 27) Hamid Mahmoud Hamid 28) Osman Hassan Ibrahim Aajeeb 29) Ahmed Hayteen 30) Musa Mohammed Hashim 31) Hamed Ahmed Osman 32) Mohammed Saeed Sheneti 33) Abraha Mokenen 34) Osman Omar Shaaban 35) Abdulkader Hamdan 36) Mahmoud Ibrahim Shekeeni 37) Saleh Aamer Kekiya 38) Aafa Mohammed Hamed -

Council in Cairo to coordinate its responsibilities together with the newly elected General Command, and established a committee to investigate the problems that occurred during the era of Zonal Commands. (Dandan, 1995: 103; Mohammed Ali, 2010: 68; Abdalla Idris, 2016: 32; Izaz, 2016: 74).

However, the Adobha congress did not spare the ELF from implosion. Banning the head commanders and their deputies from being elected in the new leadership structure had its repercussion. The banned leaders did not go silent without fighting back. Tribal and regional intimacy connections would be used in the process of a power struggle. The Supreme Council did not accept the call to submit key responsibilities to the newly formed leadership (the General Command). The Supreme Council was fragile due to personal power struggle between its three key leaders – Osman Saleh Sabbe on one side and both Idris Mohammed Adem and Idris Osman Glawdeous on the opposite side. A patronage type of power relationships between the former with the Fourth Zone; and the latter two with the First Zone and the Second Zone respectively had somehow been developed (Connell, 2005: 30-31).

The newly elected leaders were mostly young and ambitious. They were graduates of different military training abroad. On 25 August 1969, the newly elected leadership conducted its first meeting where it divided itself into seven committees to oversee the overall functions of the ELF (Izaz, 2016: 289).<sup>63</sup> However, the prevailed power struggle derailed the struggle from moving forward. The opposition to the resolutions of the congress and the new leadership came from both inside the field and from those structures outside the field (the Supreme Council

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<sup>63</sup> According to Izaz (2016: 289), the seven committees were: (1) Chairperson: Mohammed Ahmed Abdu, and Secretariat: Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim and Ramadan Mohammednur, (2) Political Committee: Mohammed Ibrahim Chekeeni, Isaias Afwerki, Saleh Mohammed Fikak, Mohammed Saeed Sheneti, Mohammedberhan Belata, and Ahmed Mohammed Hayteen, (3) Military Committee: Abdalla Idris Mohammed, Tesfay Tekhle, Adem Saleh Shedeli, Aafa Mohammed Hamid, Saleh Jemjam, Saleh Faraj Ali, Ibrahim Mahmoud, Abdalla Mahmoud, Jaafar Jaber, Ibrahim Yaseen Jimeal, and Saleh Aamer Kekiya, (4) Security Committee: Saleh Said Hayottee, Ahmed Adem Omar, Ahmed Ibrahim, Osman Omar Shaaban, and Saeed Saleh, (5) Finance Committee: Mohammed Osman Izaz, Abdalraqueeb Mohammed Musa, Mohammed Ahmed Idris, Aamer Taher Shihabi, and Abraha Mokonen, (6) Healthcare Committee: Abdelkader Ramadan, Abdelkader Hamdan, Yaseen Al Haj, and Ibrahim Abdalla, (7) The Judiciary: Musa Mohammed Hashem and Hamed Ahmed Osman.

and the Revolutionary Command). Two major challenges were the opposition that came from the Supreme Council and the process of restructuring the armed forces under a new central command (Izaz, 2016: 61; Abdalla Idris, 2016: 34).

The challenge from the Supreme Council did not simply erupt during the Adobha congress. As explained above, the three key leaders of the Supreme Council – Osman Salem Sabe, Idris Osman Glawdeous, and Idris Mohammed Adem – had not had good working relationship. They had been accusing one another of tribalism and regionalism. In such fragile relationships, the emergence of the reformist movement in the field and its determination to relocate the central leadership from abroad to the field inside Eritrea was quite challenging to the Supreme Council. However, that did not stop them from establishing new structures and connection in the field to be used as a power base. In short, the Supreme Council leaders did not accept the resolution of the Adobha congress that intended to diffuse their power (Mohammed Ali, 2010: 82-83).

Osman Saleh Sabbe – a key figure in the Surepme Council – called for a meeting in Amman, the Capital of Jordan. The meeting was held from 15 to 18 November 1969. The meeting was attended by members of the foreign offices of the Supreme Council and those who supported Osman Saleh Sabbe. However, the chairman of the Supreme Council, Idris Mohammed Adem, was not invited. In the meeting, the Supreme Council was dissolved. A new structure was formed and was called *Al-Amana Al-Aama* (translated: General Secretariat). Osman Saleh Sabbe was declared as the Chairman of the General Secretariat. Idris Mohammed Adem, who was excluded from the meeting, on his part rejected the Amman meeting and its outcome and declared the Supreme Council was not dissolved (Mohammed Ali, 2010: 83; Tedla Bairu, 2016: 98).

In December 1969, a committee that was assigned to accomplish the restructuring of the armed forces - through mergers – met in a place called Tahra, Northern Eritrea. However,



the procedure did not satisfy all groups. Disagreement and conflict of interest (power struggle) ensued. On 25 July 197, six members from the newly elected leadership who were implicated in the unrest were arrested (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 34; Izaz, 2016: 61-62).<sup>64</sup> Therefore, this study identifies two major occurrences that marked the beginning of the implosion of the ELF. One was the dissolving of the Supreme Council and the formation of the General Secretariat in Amman. The second was the resistance to the restructuring of armed forces and the decision to arrest the alleged leaders behind the resistance.

Most of the arrested six were from the former Fourth Zone and were natives of the Semhar / Red Sea region. They were accused of regionalism. They were also linked to Osman Saleh Sabbe, who on his part, was accused, by Idris Mohammed Adem, of unilaterally dissolving the Supreme Council (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 34). According to the interview I conducted with Mohammedberhan Belata, at that point, two main blocs emerged: the Western Lowland and the Red Sea blocs. In between were those who found themselves fewer in number. Among those fewer in number were the highland Christians, who would sooner emerge as a formidable group. The highlanders already had grievances about mistreatment and lack of national agenda in the ELF. Simultaneously with the Adboha crisis, two prominent fighters from the highland, were killed in a controversial hijack by the ELF security squad. The two freedom fighters were Kidane Kiflu and Wolday Ghidey.<sup>65</sup>

The aftermath of the Adobha congress was compounded by many issues. The dissatisfaction of the Eritrean highlanders prevailed and was now exacerbated by the killing of Kidane Kiflu and Wolday Ghidey. The grievances can be traced back to the era of Zonal Commands where the highlanders were very few. It was not easy for them joining all Zonal

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<sup>64</sup> According to Izaz (2016: 61-62) and Abdalla Idris (2016: 34), the arrested six were: (1) Taher Aamer Shahabi (2) Ibrahim Jimeal (3) Abdelkader Hamdan (4) Osman Omar Shaaban (5) Mohammed Saeed Sheneti (6) Saleh Aamer Kekiya

<sup>65</sup> Interview I conducted with veteran freedom fighter Mohammedberhan Belata. Interview conducted on 08 March 2021

Commands, except the Third Zone. The Third Zone covered the highland provinces of Akkelguzzay and Seraye and many of its members were composed of the Saho/Asaorta and the Jeberti ethnic groups who were from the highlands. The formation of the Fifth Zone in 1966 was meant to cover the remaining highland province, Hamassien province, and to encourage the participation of the highlanders. However, even after the formation of the Fifth Zone, the highlanders did not feel safe from animosity and persecution (Connell, 2005: 32-33).

When the Adobha congress crisis ensued, all those who had dissatisfaction one way or the other would join the fray. In the interviews I conducted with several veterans<sup>66</sup> of the EWI, the aftermath of the Adobha congress led to emergence of several dissident groups. The main group was led by Osman Saleh Sabbe and his followed him. In the beginning, those who followed Sabbe were almost all those who sought to split themselves from the ELF. They were mostly from the former Fourth Zone and Fifth Zone. It also included from the other Zones. Generally, they were of two types of groups. The dominant of which was comprised mostly of the natives of the Red Sea region and a few from the highlands. The group included the former Fourth Zone head commander, Mohammed Ali Omaru. It also included Ramadan Mohammednur and Mesfun Hagos, who would later become among top leaders in the stages to follow. The second group, which was also a small group, was comprised of a Marya tribal group and natives of the Sahel province in Northern Eritrea. The group had grievances of being excluded from power sharing formulas. There was another group that declared a split while on duty in the highlands and camped in a place called Aala. This group was led by Isaias Afwerki. There was also another group of Beni-Aamer tribe that clashed with some of the newly elected General Command leadership members and camped in a place called Obel in the Barka region.

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<sup>66</sup> Interviews I conducted with veteran freedom fighters 1) Mohammedberhan Belata. Interview conducted, 08 March 2021 2) Idris Omer Bererai. Interview conducted, 11 March 2021. 3) Ahmad Al-Qaysi, a veteran who was amongst the founding members of the PLF in Dankalia. Interview conducted, 09 March 2021. 4) Tesfay Temnewo. Interview conducted, 18 August 2021.

Later was identified after the name of the place it camped at, Obel (Pool, 2001: 67; Markakis, 1987: 127-128).

## **6.7 The Re-Grouping and the Emergence of PLF**

Osman Saleh Sabbe opened office in Khartoum where he welcomed all the dissidents who broke away from the ELF. Then a place was identified where all the dissidents would meet and form a new organization. The place that was identified for their meeting was in Dankalia, South-Eastern Eritrea. To that end, Osman Saleh Sabbe arranged airplane shuttle to transport most of the dissidents. The planes took-off from Khartoum, Sudan and landed at Aden, Yemen. Then the journey continued from Aden back to Eritrea where they planned to gather, Dankalia. From Aden to Dankalia, they had to cross the Red Sea by small boats. Those who did not fly to Aden would sail on boats directly from northern Red Sea of Eritrea to the south, Dankalia. These groups met in Dankalia. From 24 June to 02 July 1970, they held their first meeting in a place called SodohaEila in Danakalia. About 100 freedom fighters attended the meeting and elected 9-member leadership. They called their new organization People's Liberation Front (PLF) (Pool, 2001: 67; Markakis, 1987: 132).<sup>67</sup>

The PLF was a temporary alliance between different groups, who decided to split from the ELF. Based on the interviews I conducted with veterans<sup>68</sup> of the EWI, who were members of the breakaway groups, the major group was composed of natives of the Red Sea region (Semhar and Dankalia), natives of the Sahel region, and natives of the highlands. The natives of the Red Sea region were the majority in numbers. However, in the first few months of its

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<sup>67</sup> According to David Pool (2001: 64) and Markakis (1987: 132), The PLF elected 9-member leadership: (1) Mohammed Ali Omaru (2) Mesfun Hagos (3) Mohammed Omar Abdalla Abu-Tayara (4) Alamin Mohammed Saeed (5) Mohammed Osman Ahmed (6) Measho Embaye (7) Mehari Debessay (8) Ali Osman, and (9) Omer Damer.

<sup>68</sup> I conducted interviews with veterans 1) Ahmad Al-Qaysi, 2) Idris Omer Bererai. 3) Tesfay Temnewo..

formation, the newly formed PLF faced with some internal instability. One issue of conflict was on choosing a base area (where to camp). Failing to agree on choosing a base area, a temporary split occurred. The group comprised of the natives of the Sahel region, under the leadership of Mohammed Omar Abdalla (Abu-Tayara) and Omar Damer, returned to the Sahel region, northern Eritrea. Similar measure also taken by the natives of Dankalia (the Afars). Similar instability also unfolded among the highlanders. However, the problem was solved, and the groups re-joined the PLF. On the other hand, the highlanders who were among these groups were not settled yet. They chose to depart the PLF and join the Ala group, which was led by Isaias Afwerki. Therefore, they departed including the three who were elected in the 9-member leadership of the PLF. The three were, Mesfun Hagos, Mehari Debessay, and Maasho Embaye.

The Aala group comprised of mainly Christian highlanders remained sceptic of joining arms with Muslim dominated groups. They opted to maintain in the Ala group. Many new volunteers from the highland joined the Ala group considering it belonged to the highlanders. In the interview I conducted with him, veteran freedom fighter Ahmed Al-Qayssi explained that in August 1971, the Ala group held its first meeting in a place called Tekhli on the Eastern escarpment of Eritrea and elected a 5-member leadership.<sup>69</sup> In its first meeting, the group also issued a manifesto in Tigrinja language called *nihnana elamanan* (translated: we and our objectives). In the manifesto, the problems the Christian highlanders suffered from under the ELF leadership was highlighted. Therefore, it became the reason for the group's separation.

From 30 September 1971 to 7 October 1971, all groups of the PLF (the natives of Samhar, Dankalia, and the Sahel) came together in their first meeting in a place called Embahra and elected a 5-member new leadership (Pool, 2001: 66).<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the PLF that was formed

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<sup>69</sup> Pool (2001: 68) listed the name of the elected 5-member leadership: (1) Isaias Afwerki (2) Mesfun Hagos (3) Tewolde Iyob (4) Solomon Woldemariyam, and (5) Asmerom Gerezgiher. This researcher interview with veteran Ahmed Al-Qaysi. Interview conducted, 09 March 2021; See David Pool (2001, p. 68)

<sup>70</sup> The five elected leadership members were: Ramadan Mohammednur, Ahmad Hilal, Abubakar Mohammed Hassan, Saleh Tataw, and Abubakar Mohammed JimeA. This researcher interview with veteran Ahmed Al-Qaysi.

in June-July 1970 at SodohEila lost some leadership members and was forced to elect new leadership. On the other side, as is above, the Aala group has also elected its learders and started strengthening itself with new volunteer recruits. Both the SodohEila and the Aala groups had a common threat, which was the ELF. When these groups split themselves from the ELF, there was attempts by the ELF to convince them to re-join it, but the splinter groups did not agree. Consequently, the ELF would want to liquidate the groups violently.<sup>71</sup>

The threat from the ELF, therefore, brought the SodohEila and the Aala groups in one line of self-defence. Besides, Osman Saleh Sabbe, who controlled the sources of support for finance and weapons, wanted to extend his power base by bringing these two groups together. On their part, the two sides needed material support. As explained in the next chapter, having a common enemy, the ELF, and connecting with Osman Saleh Sabbe as a prominent fund-raiser created an environment where they entered a gradual process of integrating their forces. The integration process continued till 1977 during which a first organizational congress was held. The organization was named the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The EPLF, then, emerged as a formidable competitor to the ELF.<sup>72</sup>

On the other side, the ELF, after the departure of the splinter groups, as explained above, embarked on its plans to conduct its first national congress. Based on my interview with veteran freedom fighter Yousuf Berhanu and personal account of veteran fighter Abdalla Idris (2016: 42-43), the ELF conducted its first national congress from 14 October to 12 November 1971 in a place called Aar near the border between northern Eritrea and Sudan. About 600 delegates from the armed forces and civic society members in different countries attended the congress. The congress elected 15-member leadership, which was called Revolutionary Council (RC). The 13 were elected from the congress while the remaining places were reserved for future

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Interview conducted, 09 March 2021. Also, this researcher interview with veteran freedom fighter Idris Omer Bererai. Interview conducted, 11 March 2021.

<sup>71</sup> From the interviews I conducted with veterans 1) Ahmed Al-Qaysi 2) Idris Omer Bererai

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

civic organizations (such as workers association and women's association). This was because the congress decided that establishing civic organizations such as women association, farmers association, and students' association as important part of struggle. The leftist oriented leadership pushed to the idea of forming mass organizations.<sup>73</sup> The ELF also held its second congress from 6 to 28 May 1975. In the congress, attended mass organizations such as the workers association, the students' association, the Women association, the refugees' association, and the farmers' association (Izaz, 2016, 120; Abdalla Idris, 2016; 60-61).

## **6.8 Conclusion**

The formation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) marked the start of the war of Eritrean independence. The war did not erupt all of the sudden. It was a continuation of the political struggle that had started in the 1940s. The goal of the struggle had always been the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination. In 1956, a peaceful political disobedience attempted to mobilize the people of Eritrea to rally for independence. However, the movement was a clandestine movement. Its clandestine nature and its peaceful way met with opposition from Eritreans who saw an armed struggle was the only way to achieve independence. Therefore, three sections of the Eritrean societies joined hands to form the armed organization. The three sections were exiled Eritrean students in Cairo, exiled veteran Eritrean politicians of the 1940s and 1950s, and Eritrean who served in the Sudanese Military Forces.

The formation process of the armed struggle took two phases. The first phase took no longer than one year. It was a formation of the political structure of the organization during which the name, and the objectives of the organization were identified. The name was ELF.

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<sup>73</sup> My interview with veteran freedom fighter Yousuf Berhanu, interview conducted 13 March 2021. And, personal account of Abdalla Idris Mohammed (2016, Pp. 42 – 43)

The second phase entailed the start of the war that lasted for thirty years. Within the second phase, the ELF was challenged by several problems. The major problem was the power struggle that unfolded amongst the various personalities and groups within the ELF. Consequently, the ELF went into disarray and imploded. The implosion was manifested by the emergence of new factions which were not welcomed by the ELF. A civil war ensued between the ELF and the breakaway groups. However, the breakaway groups survived the civil war and joined arms and integrated as one organization. The result was that there had been more than two armed organizations in the field of the EWI. The remained two rival factions were the ELF and the splinter organization called PLF, later in 1977 changed into the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF). The EPLF then emerged as the winner of the EWI in 1991.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Discussion of the Findings**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. The findings reflect the political economy of the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI) in the context of how power relationships among various leaders, groups, and factions developed throughout the 30-year War period. They are presented in four major themes. The first theme discusses the prevalence of power struggle during the EWI. The prevalence of power struggle included individual power struggle, negative experiences of failed military administrative structures, conflict among military commanders, the role of reform movement, and implosion of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The second theme discusses how and why civil war ensued among different armed factions in the aftermath of the implosion of the ELF. The third theme focusses on the breakaway groups that split from the ELF, and the formation of the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF). The fourth theme compares the ELF and the EPLF as two competing and rival armed organizations during the second half of the 30-year war period, and how the EPLF won the war of independence. The fourth theme also highlights the contribution of the EWI to the State formation in Eritrea.



## 7.1 The Prevalence of Power Struggle During the EWI

In this section, five categories have been identified to discuss the prevalence of power<sup>74</sup> struggle during the EWI. One, that power struggle occurred at individual level among the key leaders of the Supreme Council (SC) of the ELF. Two, that the negative experience of imported Algerian model of dividing the Eritrean Liberation Army (ELA) into zonal commands. Three, that there was conflict between the ELA Commanders in the Field<sup>75</sup>. Four, that reform movement emerged, and several historical meetings took place in attempts to solve conflicts over power. Five, that the aftermath of the final meeting called by the reformist movement was the implosion of the ELF.

Before delving into the five categories of power struggle unfolded during the EWI that occurred from 1961 to 1991, presenting brief highlights on the preceded political situation in Eritrea is helpful to understand the succeeded situation. The political situation in Eritrea that preceded the start of the EWI was identified by divided political blocs occurred during the mid-1940s and onwards. During the 1940s, the Eritrean political landscape was broadly divided into two political blocs (Tesfai, 2001: 186-189; Negash, 1997: 19; Trevaskis, 1960: 61). One was known as Independent Bloc (IB) because it advocated for Eritrea's independence. The second was known as Unionist Bloc (UB) because it advocated for unity between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The IB rallied round a political party called Muslim League (ML). The UB rallied round a political party called Unionist Party (UP). Most of the IB members were Muslims, while most of the UB members were Christians. Yet, religion was not a binding factor in both blocs. The ML was further divided into regional and tribal semi-blocs. By the end of the 1940s, ML

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<sup>74</sup> Power in this study refers to political power in the context of controlling decision-making leadership positions.

<sup>75</sup> The term Field meant areas inside Eritrea where the freedom fighters were based, and battles took place.

western lowlands branch and ML red sea region branch were formed. In the highlands, a party of independence was formed known as Liberal Progressive Party (LPP) (ibid).

To relate the political divide during the 1940s to the EWI period, two important aspects of historical background need to be supplemented. First, that the importance of brief explanation about the Eritrean peoples' religious classification and geographical areas within the country. Second, that the period that linked the 1940s political situation to the period of the EWI. In the first aspect, the Eritrean people are almost equally divided into Muslims and Christians. Most of the Eritrean Muslims live in lowland areas of the country. Lowland areas of Eritrea comprise western and eastern parts of the country. Besides geography, the Eritrean Muslims are also diverse along the lines of their tribal, clan, and ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, most of the Eritrean Christians live in highland areas of the country. Highland areas of Eritrea comprise southern parts of the country. Besides, the Eritrean Christians are also diverse along the lines of their villages and provinces (aka regions). (Pool, 2001: 5-11; Trevaskis, 1960: 1-4; Nadel, 1944: 5-52). In the second aspect, the period that linked the 1940s political situation to the EWI period was the 1950s that marked peaceful disobedience against Ethiopia's violation of the UN imposed federal arrangement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as explained in chapters 4, 5, and 6. Therefore, the EWI came as a consequence of the UN's failure to settle Eritrea's colonial case of independence that was compounded by Ethiopia's infringement on the federal agreement to occupy the territory.

## **7.2 Individual Power Struggle**

In this section, the prevalence of power struggle during the EWI at the individual level refers to conflicts between key leaders over controlling decision-making processes in the early years of the ELF. The reason for selecting specific period (early years of the ELF) is because it was the period during which the phenomenon of individual power struggle developed. Early

years of the ELF refers to its first and second phases of formation. The time span of the first and second phases of formation covered from late-1960 to mid-1968. In this context, three developments are identified. First, that there were three key individuals who were involved in the power struggle. Two, that there were factors that contributed to the individual power struggle. Third, that the individual power struggle had implications to the ELF as an Armed Guerrilla Organization (AGO) that fought for Eritrea's Independence.

In the first development, the three key individuals who were involved in the power struggle were identified. They were, 1) Idris Mohammed Adem 2) Osman Saleh Sabbe, and 3) Idris Osman Glawdeous. As explained in the preceding chapter, Idris Mohammed Adem was a Muslim by religion, and a native of western lowlands of Eritrea. He was one of the top leaders of the Eritrean government during mid-1950s. Osman Saleh Sabbe was a Muslim by religion, and a native of the red sea region of Eritrea. He was a former school headmaster in his native region. Idris Osman Gelawdeous was a Muslim by religion, and a native of Sanhit province of Eritrea. He was one of the exiled Eritrean students based in Cairo. Therefore, except for their religion, they had different background.

In the second development, to understand the factors that contributed to the individual power struggle, it is important to describe the leadership structure of the ELF. The leadership structure of the ELF was composed of two main structures: the Supreme Council (SC) and the ELA commandship in the Field<sup>76</sup>. The ELA commandship was later divided into Military Administrative Zones (MAZ), as discussed below. The SC was the leadership structure that was adopted during the first and second phases of formation of the ELF. According to personal historical accounts of veterans of the EWI (Abdalla Idris, 2016; Izaz, 2016; Mohammed Ali, 2010; Dandan, 1996) and confirmed through interviews I conducted with veterans (Mohammedberhan Belata, Mohammed Nugus Bahta, Saleh Mohammed Saeed, and Idris

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<sup>76</sup> The term Field meant areas inside Eritrea where the freedom fighters were based, and battles took place.

Omar Beriray), the SC was formed in early 1961. The SC played key role in defining the power structures of the ELF. It divided the ELA along regional lines and introduced the MAZ. The SC had its headquarters in exile in Cairo and Damascus. Therefore, geographically, the SC was located far away from Eritrea. The key leaders of the SC were Idris Mohammed Adem, Osman Saleh Sabbe, and Idris Osman Glawdeous. Their positions were chairman of the ELF, Foreign Mission of the ELF, and Military Affairs Head of the ELF respectively.

The ELA was formed on the first of September 1961 when the EWI officially waged. This is because the first bullet was fired by the pioneer person who led the ELA. The pioneer commander of the ELA was called Hamid Idris Awate as introduced in the preceding chapter. The ELA underwent several changes before the introduction of the MAZ and thereafter. For example, the sudden death of the pioneer leader of the ELA (explained in the preceding chapter) before the introduction of the MAZ created a situation whereby a conflict arose over the issue of who should replace the position of Hamid Idris Awate. The conflict led to changes of leadership positions in the ELA. The role of Osman Saleh Sabbe, one of the three key leaders, in mediating the conflict had been noticeable as discussed below. An example of changes after the introduction of the MAZ was the recruitment of several new commanders to hold commandership positions in the ELA. The new commanders were volunteers who were sent by the SC to receive military training in friendly countries such as Syria.

The three key leaders of the SC mentioned above dominated the decision-making processes that affected the power relationships between the SC and the ELA commandership in the Field. From the three key leaders of the SC, the role of Osman Saleh Sabbe was repeatedly mentioned by the veterans of the EWI I conducted interviews with (Mohammedberhan Belata, Mohammed Nugus Bahta, Idris Omar Beriray, Ahmed Al-Qayssi), and the personal historical accounts written by several other veterans of the EWI (Abdalla Idris, 2016; Izaz, 2016;

Mohammed Ali, 2010; Dandan, 1996). According to Idris Mohammed Adem,<sup>77</sup> Osman Saleh Sabbe was a well-articulated and well-connected former teacher from the Red Sea region of Eritrea. Although a teacher by profession and background, Sabbe had already embarked on forming cooperative organization aiming to help poor Muslim communities in the horn of African. The nature of activities of the cooperative organization Sabbe had attempted to work with needed networking with regional and international organizations. The Arab and the Muslim World were the immediate outreach giving the geographical location of Eritrea. While in such an endeavour, Sabbe met Idris Mohammed Adem sometime during the first phase formation of the ELF.<sup>78</sup> It did not take much time for Sabbe to become a key role player in the foreign mission representing the ELF.

Therefore, the factors that contributed to the individual power struggle are discussed within the context of the SC decision-making processes and its relationships with the ELA commandership in the Field. As a decision maker political structure of the ELF, the SC served as the central ground to the individual power struggle. Historical personal accounts of veterans of the EWI (mentioned above) and interviews I conducted with veterans (mentioned above), show that between 1961 to 1964 there was no visible individual rift among the three leaders of the SC. “It [the ELF] was still in its inception”, said veteran Mohamedberhan Belata.<sup>79</sup> In those early years, the SC was occupied with diplomatic mission of searching for weapons and financial support to be provided to the ELA in the Field, as depicted in the preceding chapter. Mohammedberhan Belata explained that, in the interview I conducted with him, in 1963 Idris Mohammed Adem and Osman Saleh Sabbe succeeded in their diplomatic campaigns and won the support of the Syrian government in opening its doors to the ELF. The ELF opened an office in Damascus, Syria. From its office in Syria, the ELF not only managed to secure military

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<sup>77</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem, the founding chairman of the ELF, in an interview he gave to Gunter Schroeder on 15 March 1989 in Khartoum, Sudan

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> This researcher interview with Mohammedberhan Belata, interview conducted on 08 March 2021

support from the Syrian government, but also it used the opportunity as a springboard to reach out to other Middle Eastern countries and beyond. The Syria connection became a big success in the SC's endeavours to establish foreign relations. Sabbe, as the head of the foreign mission, benefited from the exposure to different regional and global diplomatic networks. He managed to establish contacts with various governments and non-governmental organizations. According to Mohammedberhan Belata,<sup>80</sup> Idris Mohammed Adem and Idris Osman Glawdeous would not be at ease with Sabbe's growing influence on matters of support that came from different countries.

In the third development, the individual power struggle that had negative implications to the ELF as an organization appeared with the introduction of the MAZ. In what appeared to be an attempt to improve the military capability and political outlook of the ELF, the SC decided to simulate the Algerian model (as explained in the preceding chapter) of dividing the ELA along regional lines of command. Based on the Algerian model, the ELA was divided into several MAZ as described below. The simulation of MAZ proved a failure at which also the power struggle between the three key leaders became visible.

### **7.3 The Negative Experience of Imported Algerian Model**

Mohammed Nugus Bahta, Mohammedberhan Belata, and Saleh Mohammed Saeed who joined the ELF between 1962 and 1964, explained that by simulating the Algerian model (Algerien Front de Liberation National eight-year guerrilla struggle) of dividing the Eritrea ELA into regional commands, the SC established four MAZ in 1965, and a year later a fifth was added.<sup>81</sup> They were referred to as First Zone, Second Zone, Third Zone, Fourth Zone, and

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> This researcher interview with Mohammedberhan Belata, interview conducted on 08 March 2021. This researcher interview with Mohammed Nugus Bahta conducted on 25 July 2021. This researcher interview with a

Fifth Zone. The establishment of the MAZ meant that five autonomous MAZ were established. Mohammedberhan Belata, a veteran of the EWI who joined the ELF in 1964 and served as an assistant political commissar of the Third Zone in 1965/66, did not consider the establishment of the MAZ *per se* as a problem. He said, “when the Algerians divided their army along administrative zones by assigning natives to their Zones of origin, the aim was that the guerrillas would be accepted by the people so easily. The model worked in Algeria, therefore, the SC hoped it would work in Eritrea too.” However, Mohammedberhan Belata added that the experience had also negative effects. He said, “some of the MAZ Commanders behaved like tribal chiefs. Therefore, tribal tendencies were visible in some of the Five MAZ”.

Idris Omar Beriray, a veteran of the EWI who joined the ELF in 1967 and was a member of the Fourth Zone, in an interview I conducted with him said that there was negative experience of the MAZ. He said, “for example, there was no cooperation between the five Zones. For example, whenever military attack against the Fourth Zone occurred, none of the other Zones would arrive for help. But there was cooperation between the Third Zone and the Fourth Zone where geographical proximity allowed so”. Beriray explained that a major reason for the lack of cooperation between the Zones was hindrance of geographical distance from each other. Besides, Beriray identified a negative experience of the MAZ whereby a sense of regionalism developed. “For example, if a member of a certain Zone wanted to join another Zone, he was not welcomed, and would be told to return to his Zone. Therefore, each Zone stood alone”. In general, Beriray considered the establishment of the MAZ as a negative experience.

Ibrahim Mohammed Ali, a veteran of the EWI who joined the ELF in 1964, in his “personal account”<sup>82</sup> identified three major repercussions of the establishment of the MAZ.

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vetran freedom fighter, Saleh Mohammed Saeed, interview conducted on 25 July 2021. This researcher interview with Idris Omar Beriray, interview conducted on 11 March 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Mohammed Ali, Ibrahim (2010: 44) *Maseerat Jabhat Tahrir Al-Eritrea – Bidaya wa Nihaya* (My translation: The March of the Eritrean Liberation Front – Beginning and End)

First, that the MAZ created an environment whereby the ELA commanders in the Field (the five Zones) failed to cooperate with each other. Each Zone acted as an autonomous region and the ELA commanders competed against one another. The situation was exacerbated due to lack of existence of central command in the Field. The result was that the MAZ would finally appear as Military fiefdoms which competed against one another. Second, that there occurred tribal and regional sectarianism. For example, in the Second Zone, fighters who were natives of the Sahel region of Eritrea tended to form separate group. In the First Zone there was a sectarian group known as *Kasar* which was composed of natives of the Gash region. Similar sectarianism occurred in the Fourth Zone. The consequence of the sectarian tendencies affected badly the ELF, and many fighters abandoned the Field. Third, that there was disparity in financial income, military, and security issues among the five Zones. The financial income of the First Zone, the Second Zone, and the Fourth Zone was much higher than the Third Zone and Fifth Zone. The reason for that was the regions where the three Zones were located were relatively free from the enemy reach; therefore, mobilization of resources was better. The Third Zone and the Fifth Zone were in the highlands of Eritrea where the movement of the enemy was intensive and fighting occurred more often. Therefore, they were disadvantaged.

Mohammed Osman Izaz, a veteran of the EWI who joined the ELF in 1965 and served in different top leadership positions of the ELF, in his “personal account”<sup>83</sup> identified positive and negative sides of the establishment of the MAZ. The positive sides he identified can be summed up into three ideas. First, that familiarity with an area helped mobilize the people and resources easily and enabled flexible movements during battles. Second, that decentralization of administrative structures made decision-making processes easier. It also eased the difficulty of quick communication with higher leadership. Third, that it could be taken as an

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<sup>83</sup> Izaz, Mohammed Osman (2016: 64-65). *Jabhat Tahrir Eritrea: Intisar Al-Bidaya Wa Intikasad Al-Nihaya*. (My translation: The Eritrean Liberation Front: The victory of the beginning and the setback of the end). Homib Publishing, No City



acknowledgment of the reality of the social fabrics of the Eritrean societies. The negative sides he identified can be summed up into five points. First, that the establishment of the MAZ did not put into consideration the reality of Eritrea and its societies, because the reality of Algeria was never the same as Eritrea. Second, that it created regionalism and sectarianism. Third, that disagreements arose between the SC and the ELA commanders in the Field due to administrative problems. Fourth, that there were disparities in financial income between the five Zones. Fifth, that conflict erupted among the ELA commanders in the Field. The ELA commanders were composed of earlier commanders with background from the Sudanese Military Forces (SMF) and new commanders who had been sent by the SC to Middle East countries such as Syria for military training.

Markakis (1987: 15) argued that the establishment of the MAZ led to “ethnic parochialism”. He based his argument on the process of ethnic based selection of MAZ commanders. Each selected commander was a native of the region where he was assigned. Thus, Markakis defined the MAZ along the line of ethnic groups. He depicted the First Zone as a Beni-Amer tribal fief shared by the Baria tribe. The Second Zone belonged to Blin, Marya, and Habab tribal groups. The Third Zone as a Saho tribe stronghold. The Fourth Zone as belonged to red sea region groups. Markakis also explained that there was a patronage relationship between the SC key leaders and the MAZ. According to Markakis (1987: 115), the First Zone enjoyed the patronage of Idris Mohammed Adem, who was from the Beni-Amer tribe. The Second Zone enjoyed the patronage of Idris Osman Glawdeous, who was from the Blin tribe. The Fourth Zone enjoyed the patronage of Osman Saleh Sabe, who was from the red sea region. The Third Zone and the Fifth Zone did not have patronage in the SC because they did not have regional and tribal affinity with the three key leaders.

The negative experience of the imported Algerian model was reflected through two major developments as explained above. First, that the simulation of the Algerian model

resulted in sectarian tendencies based on tribe and region. Leaders of some of the Zones behaved as tribal chiefs implies it was attempt by the leaders to build separate power base. In other words, the simulation of the Algerian model as stipulated above marked power struggle based on tribal and regional sectarianism. Second, that the SC was not free from the sectarian tendencies which occurred because of the zonalization of the ELA. The three key leaders of the SC became part of the sectarian tendencies, which led to friction among them. The friction among the three key leaders developed to competition over power through building power bases based on regional and tribal affinity.

#### **7.4 The Conflict Among the ELA Commanders**

In this section, the conflict among the ELA commanders in the field is based on two phenomena. One, that the conflict over who should replace Hamid Idris Awate after his death on the 18th of April 1962. Second, that conflict arose between commanders with different military backgrounds. Two groups with different types of backgrounds are identified. The first group was composed of commanders who had been in the Sudanese Military Forces (SMF) and later joined the ELA. The second group was composed of commanders who were sent by the SC to receive military training in countries such as Syria. After they returned from the training, they were assigned as military commanders in the ELA in the Field.

The first phenomenon at which conflict among the ELA commanders erupted was a succession issue. Mohammed Nugus Bahta, a veteran of the EWI who joined the ELF in late 1962 and served as one of the top military leaders in the Third Zone, explained<sup>84</sup> that the phenomenon occurred when Hamid Idris Awate, the pioneer leader of the ELA, died as early as April 1962; only few months after he fired the first bullet and fought few battles. After Hamid

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<sup>84</sup> This researcher interview with Mohammed Nugus Bahta, Interview was conducted on 25 July 2021.

Idris Awate started the EWI on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1961, some Eritreans who served in the SMF joined him in the Field. They were experienced soldiers with some military titles. However, after Hamid Idris Awate died, they disagreed over who should replace his leadership position. Some of them who had higher ranks in the SMF wanted the positions to be arranged based on their SMF titles. Therefore, conflict erupted. There are two explanations about how the conflict was solved. The first explanation is about how a mediation by Osman Saleh Sabbe solved the conflict. Osman Saleh Dandan, a veteran of the EWI who joined the ELF in 1962, wrote in his “personal account”<sup>85</sup> that in December 1962, Sabbe presided over a meeting that lasted for five days in a place called Barqasheesh in the Barka region. In the meeting, 44 freedom fighters attended, and at the conclusion of the meeting on 16 December 1962, a 5-member leadership from amongst the fighters was elected.<sup>86</sup> The second explanation is about how a mediation by renowned elderly person solved the conflict. Mohammedberhan Blata, a veteraf of the EWI, mentioned above, identified a mediation by a prominent elder named Shaikh Dawud and a cooperation by a renowned veteran named Mahmoud Mohammed Saleh.<sup>87</sup> The contribution of Shaikh Dawud in encouraging and supporting the EWI from its outset, is explained in the preceding chapter. Therefore, Shaikh Dawud’s contribution in the mediation process to solve the conflict over succession issue cannot be ignored.

The conflict among the ELA military commanders over who controlled highest leadership position did not end with solving the succession issue after the death of Hamid Idris Awate. The conflict took different form of power struggle. Now the conflict was between those commanders, who stayed in the struggle longer, and those who received military training in countries such as Syria and assigned as commanders. The two groups had two types of

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<sup>85</sup> See Osman Saleh Dandan, a veteran of the war himself, wrote his account of the war in Arabic language. Here its title as translated in English: Osman Saleh Dandan (1995, p. 59). *The Eritrean War: 1961 – 1970*.

<sup>86</sup> See Osman Saleh Dandan, a veteran of the war himself, wrote his account of the war in Arabic language. Here its title as translated in English: Osman Saleh Dandan (1995, p. 59). *The Eritrean War: 1961 – 1970*.

<sup>87</sup> This researcher interview with veteran fighter Mohammedberhan Belata. Interview conducted on 08 March 2021

difference. One, that the first group had longer military experience as soldiers in the SMF, while the second group received its military training abroad but did not have experience. Second, that the first group joined the ELA earlier and considered themselves pioneers of the ELA. The second group was composed of former student who volunteered to receive military training and join the ELA. Besides, the training they received abroad they did not have practical experience in the Field. However, according to Mohammed Nugus Bahta, a veteran mentioned above, the former students perceived that the military training they received was superior to the military background and experience of the first group.

According to interviews I conducted with veterans Mohammedberhan Belata, Mohammed Nugus Bahta, Saleh Mohammed Saeed, and Idris Omar Beriray, the former students were sent by the SC for military and political training to different Middle Eastern countries. Osman Saleh Dandan, a veteran mentioned above, explained that the first batch received military training in Syria in 1963/1964. The batch was composed of twenty volunteers from amongst the exiled Eritrean students based in Cairo. In 1965, the volunteers completed their training and were assigned to take different leadership positions in the ELA in the Field. Some of the former students who would later emerge as key role players included Mohammed Ali Omaru, Abdelkarim Ahmed, Mohammed Saeed Shemsi, and Ramadan Mohammednur (Dandan, 1995: 109-110).

By the time the MAZ was established in 1965, from the former students who received military training in Syria, Mohammed Ali Omaru was assigned as the head commander of ForZ. Abdelkarim Ahmed was assigned as the head commander of Third Zone. From the earlier group with the SMF background, Mahmoud Dinai was assigned as the head of First Zone. Omar Izaz was assigned as the head of Second Zone.<sup>88</sup> According to the MAZ plan, as stipulated above, the assignment of the head commanders was based on tribal and regional belonging. Therefore,

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<sup>88</sup> This researcher interview with veteran freedom fighter, Mohammed Nugus Bahta. Interview conducted: 25 July 2021.

the conflict between the older and new military commanders also involved tribal and regional frictions.

The number of freedom fighters who received military training abroad increased from time to time. Mohammed Osman Izaz, a veteran as mentioned above, wrote<sup>89</sup> about the number of freedom fighters who received military training in different countries. Syria was the first country to train five batches of Eritrean freedom fighters from 1963/4 to 1968. Iraq also trained some batches from 1964 to 1972. Two batches also received military and political training in China in 1967 and in 1968. One batch received military training in Cuba in 1968. Between 1963 and 1972, a total of 350 freedom fighters received military and political training abroad. The training involved different military skills, which contributed to building fighting capability of the ELA. It also involved political training empowered the trainees with different ideological outlooks. The political outlook mostly socialist and nationalist in orientation (Izaz, 2016: 59).

The increased number of the newly trained commanders and political cadres collided with the functions of MAZ and the role of the SC. Several issues were raised, and problems exacerbated. Consequently, voices of reform started to grow. A movement dubbed *Eslah* in Arabic (translated: reform) was formed that attempted to introduce reform in the ELF military and political structures.

## **7.5 The Emergence of a Reform Movement**

The emergence of the reform movement in 1966/7 was a phenomenon that reflected the multifaceted problems which occurred within the ELF. According to veteran Mohammed Osman Izaz, a veteran mentioned above and one of the reformists, the aim of the reform movement was to solve the problems that occurred in the ELF. According to Mohammed

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<sup>89</sup> Mohammed Osman Izaz (2016, p. 59)

Osman Izaz (2016: 59), the freedom fighters who received military and political training abroad were the leading members of the reform movement. within the ELF. According to veterans Mohammedberhan Belata, Mohammed Nugus Bahta, Saleh Mohammed Saeed, and Idris Omar Beriray,<sup>90</sup> some of the problem occurred in the ELF included the occurrence of various voices of minority tribes and groups that complained of being marginalized in the power sharing formulas of the MAZ system.<sup>91</sup> Among the small groups were minority tribes which were natives of Gash and Sahel regions. Another group was composed of Christian natives of the Eritrean highlands who raised issues of insecurity for being Christian in the Muslim dominated organization (the ELF), as explained in the preceding chapter.<sup>92</sup> Beyond that, power struggle, as stipulated in the above sections, was at the centre of the problems.

To achieve the objectives of their movement, the reformists held consecutive meetings between 1968 and 1969. As explained in the preceding chapter, the historic meetings were known as the Aredaib meeting, the Orotta (aka Anseba) meeting, and the Adobha congress. The reform movement via the meetings called for the end of the MAZ and formation of a central command in the Field. By doing so, the reform movement aimed to solve the issues of sectarianism and regionalism in the MAZ, within the SC, and issues of power relationships between the SC and the ELA Commanders in the Field. Out of the three historic meetings, the Adobha congress was the largest meeting that led to the implosion of the ELF.

## **7.6 The Aftermath of the Adobha Congress**

The Adobha congress was held from 10 to 25 August 1969 in a place called Adobha on Northern Eritrea. According to personal accounts written by veterans of the EWI (Abdalla Idris,

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<sup>90</sup> I conducted interviews with Mohammedberhan Belata conducted on 08 March 2021; Mohammed Nugus Bahta conducted on 25 July 2021; Saleh Mohammed Saeed, interview conducted on 25 July 2021

<sup>91</sup> Unpublished paper written by veteran freedom fighter; Ibrahim Totil titled "The Eritrean Revolution" – Pp. 153 – 160. Also, I interviewed Mohammedberhan Belata, 08 March 2021; Saleh Mohammed Saeed, 25 July 2021

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

2016: 14; Izaz, 2016: 39; Mohammed Ali, 2010: 54) and interviews I conducted with veterans (Mohammedberhan Belata, Mohammed Nugus Bahta, Saleh Mohammed Saeed, and Idris Omar Beriray), a 38-member leadership known as General Command (GC) was elected. One of my interviewees, Mohammedberhan Belata, was one of the elected 38-member leadership of the GC. As explained in the preceding chapter, most of the elected leadership were from the young generation, and many of them were members of the reform movement. However, it took them no time to enter a new form of conflict over power among themselves. My interviewees Mohammedberhan Belata and Idris Omar Beriray explained similar understanding of the phenomenon that the conflict was compounded by the problems created during the MAZ system under the older leadership. The problems explained by Mohammedberhan Belata and Idris Omar Beriray referred to the failure of MAZ as an administrative structure. Markakis (1987: 115) explained that the MAZ system produced a patronage system whereby some of the ELA commanders were linked to the three key leaders of the SC based on tribal and regional affinity.

The compounded problems went out of control in the Adobha congress. There were two major triggering factors that led to conflict during the Adobha congress. One, that the congress, under the dominant role of younger leadership, decided to exclude the head commanders and their deputies of the five Zones from being elected in the new leadership positions. Abdalla Idris (2016: 12), a veteran of the EWI and one of the younger leaders who was elected to higher position in the GC, explained that the decision to exclude the older generation of leadership was not welcomed by the older leaders such Mohammed Ali Omaru. As explained above, Mohammed Ali Omaru was the commander of the ForZ which Markakis (1987: 115) linked to Osman Saleh Sabbe, key leader of the SC. Second, that opposition to the resolutions of the Adobha congress from different sides surfaced. The resolution of the congress touched several issues including the need to form a united ELA, to establish Central Command in the Field (CCF), the SC to coordinate its activities with the CCF, and to set up a committee to investigate

all issues of complain. Mohammed Ali Ibrahim, a veteran of the EWI as mentioned above, explained in his personal account that Osman Saleh Sabbe was not happy about the resolutions of the congress and tried to hinder it. And when he (Sabbe) failed in hindering the resolutions, he called for a separate congress abroad and declared his separation (Mohammed Ali, 2010: 68). Simultaneously, the GC arrested five fighters (leaders) who opposed the resolutions of the congress. According to my interview with veteran Idris Omar Beriray, most of the arrested fighters were from the ForZ and were natives of the red sea region of Eritrea. Consequently, the fighters (including Idris Omar Beriray) who opposed the arrest of their five leaders rebelled against the GC actions. Therefore, the Adobha congress marked the beginning of new form of power struggle at which the younger generation of leadership opened a new phase of conflict.

According to veteran Mohammedberhan Belata,<sup>93</sup> who was elected as one of the 38-member GC, the ELF imploded, and several breakaway factions were formed. The main leaders of the breakaway factions were members of the newly elected GC. One of such leaders was called Isaias Afwerki. He founded a breakaway group known as the Aala Group (aka *selfi Natsenet* translated: independence party). Isaias Afwerki would later become the first president of an independent Eritrea. Another leader was Ramadan Mohammednur who was one of the leaders of the group known as the Sodoh-Eila Group. Mohammed Omar Abdalla (Abu-Tayara) led the Sahel group (aka the Marya – a tribe name - group). Adem Saleh Shedelee was the main figure of those who led the group known as the Obal Barka Group.

According to the personal accounts of veteran Ibrahim Mohammed Ali (2010: 117-122), the GC assigned a committee of six to approach and convince the breakaway groups to re-join the ELF through participating in its first national congress that was planned to be held at the end of 1971. The six committee members were Ibrahim Mohammed Ali (himself), Ahmed Mohammed Nasser, Ibrahim Ghedem, Abdalla Suleiman, Saleh Omar Shoom, and Mustafa

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<sup>93</sup> I conducted interview with veteran Mohammedberhan Belata, 08 March 2021



Abdu. In May 1971 the committee departed from the Barka region to the Samhar region to meet the splinter groups. Although they met leaders from the SodoHEila (known as PLF) group such as Mesfun Hagos and Ahmad Al-Qayssi, they could not manage to meet the top leadership. In the interview I conducted with veteran Ahmed Al-Qayssi, he confirmed the meeting. The second attempt was to meet with the Aala group. That too failed because the group was nowhere to be found. The third attempt was to meet the Sahel (Abu-Tayara) group. Although they met a member of the group, they could not manage to meet with the top leadership (Mohammed Ali, 2010: 120).

Now that the ELF imploded, and splinter factions were formed. Therefore, ELF would face competition from the breakaway factions. According to Ahmed Al-Qayssi, most of the leaders of the ELF and the breakaway factions were younger generation of leadership who received military and political training in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and China. Most of them considered themselves Marxist oriented nationalist freedom fighters. However, they failed to work together. Ahmed Al-Qaysi, a veteran of the EWI who joined the EWI in early 1971 during the time the breakaway factions just begun organizing themselves, in the interview I conducted with him, he explained that the most dangerous decision of the ELF at that critical juncture was to use force to eliminate the breakaway factions. The ELF dubbed the breakaway factions 'antagonist' forces.

As discussed above, the composition of leadership of all the factions, including the ELF, except for the Aala group, were predominantly Muslim by religion. Therefore, the decision of eliminating was made by Muslim dominated leadership of the ELF against Muslim dominated breakaway factions. It appeared that religious affinity did not play any significant role in the decision making. In fact, the ELF approach towards the Aala group (Christian by religion) was softer. According to Mohammed Ali (2010: 86) and Bairu (2016: 113), the ELF decided to engage the Aala group in dialogue rather than using force. The ELF leaders did not want to

push the Aala group into further antagonistic position, which might have had negative effect to the participation of the whole Christian society of Eritrea.<sup>94</sup>

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1972, the ELF leadership met to determine on the fate of the splinter groups (Izaz, 2016: 87; Markakis, 1987: 134). Three committees were formed to deal with the case of the splinter groups. The responsibility involved searching for the whereabouts of the breakaway groups and force them to surrender either peacefully or violently. A first committee composed of Abdalla Idris Mohammed, Mohammed Osman Izaz, and Saeed Saleh were assigned to the Barka region. A second committee composed of Tesfay Tekhle and Ibrahim Totil were assigned to the Sahil region. A third committee composed of Ibrahim Mohammed Ali and Abdelkader Ramadan were assigned to the Samhar region. The first committee that was assigned to search for the Obal barka group succeeded in making the group surrender peacefully. However, in the rest of the regions war broke out that marked the first civil war during the period of the EWI (Izaz, 2016: 87-88).

## **7.7 The Civil War**

Civil war erupted between two groups of younger leadership of the EWI who believed to have pursued same nationalist political outlook during the War. According to veteran Ahmed Al-Qaysi, the ELF's leadership considered the breakaway groups as a threat to the continuation of the EWI. On their part, the splinter groups refused to recognize the ELF as a viable organization to re-join. Therefore, the refusal to work together brought the issue of reconciliation to a dead-end. The consequence was violent confrontation through which the ELF attempted to eliminate the breakaway groups, which is referred as civil war. The civil war

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<sup>94</sup> I conducted interviews with several veterans such as Mohammed Nugus Bahata, Mohammedberhan Belata, Saleh Mohammed Saeed, and Ahmed Al-Qayssi. Also, books written by veteran freedom fighters Mohammed Osman Izaz (2016, p. 86) and Herui Tedla Bairu (2016, p. 113)

marked the transformation of power struggle from individual and sectarian based competition to more structured organizational rivalry. Because fighters from same religious, tribal, and regional background killed one another for being on the opposite camp: ELF vs breakaway factions (the interview I conducted with Ahmed Al-Qayssi).

According to veteran Ahmed Al-Qayssi, the ELF targeted the main group that had gained support from Osman Saleh Sabbe, who had already declared his separation from the ELF. Osman Saleh Sabbe was a key leader of the SC, as discussed above. The fighters who had different grievances sought support from Sabbe and gathered in south-eastern Eritrean region called Dankalia. They held their first congress in place called SodohEila in Dankalia. They, therefore, in the beginning they were identified as the SodohEila group. However, the organizational name they endorsed was Popular Liberation Front (PLF). The civil war engulfed several areas where the two sides (the ELF and the breakaway groups) met. The ELF had also issued its concern on matters of foreign mission that had been controlled by Osman Saleh Sabbe as explained in the preceding chapter. After he declared his separation from the ELF, Osman Saleh Sabbe embarked on re-structuring the SC. Consequently, fierce rivalry ensued between Osman Saleh Sabbe and the ELF. The ELF had to set up a new committee to replace the role played by Osman Saleh Sabbe as a foreign mission of the ELF (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 16).

Meanwhile, in January 1972 a meeting presided by Osman Saleh Sabe was held in Beirut, Lebanon. According to the interview I conducted with veteran Ahmed Al-Qayssi, from the side of the PLF Ramadan Mohammednur and Al Said Abdalla attended the meeting. From the Aala group Isaias Afwerki and Mesfun Hagos attended the meeting. On the side of Sabbe were Sabbe himself, Woldeab Woldemariyam, Mohammed Saeed Nawud and others. The meeting aimed to unite the breakaway groups and form a united force to compete with the ELF. They agreed on several issues. They agreed to bring the splinter groups into a united nationalist front. Three quarters of the funds raised abroad to be distributed among the three groups in the

field (the PLF, the Aala group, and the Obal Barka group) equally. The foreign mission would be headed by Osman Saleh Sabbe (Markakis, 1987: 133).

In the Field, as explained above, the decision made by the ELF in February 1972 to eliminate the breakaway groups resulted in a civil war. The Obal Barka group surrendered peacefully with few of its members remained at large (Izaz, 2016: 70-71). In March 1972, war erupted between the ELF and the PLF in the Dankalia region of Eritrea. The war continued to northern Eritrea, the Sahel region. In April 1972 the skirmishes continued in places called Hahot and Dembobiet in the Sahel region. In the Dembobiet incident the PLF and the Aala group joined their forces against the ELF. It then continued in a place called Hawalie, and then in a place called Aayet. In February 1973, a conflict that lasted for about a week erupted in a place called Ghereghir at a border with Sudan. Fighting continued across the border inside Sudan where the Sudanese armed forces intervened and pushed the fighting factions back to Eritrea (Interviews I conducted with veterans of the EWI Idris Omar Beriray, Ahmed Al-Qayssi, Tesfay Temnewo, and Mekonen Andemichael). The war in the Shael region continued till May 1973. Then it continued towards the central plateau and the environs of Asmara and lasted till 1974 (Markakis, 1987: 134).

## **7.8 The Formation of the EPLF**

Veteran Ahmed Al-Qaysi argued that the civil war created a situation whereby the PLF group and the Aala group joined their forces to defend themselves against the ELF. Veterans Idris Omar Beriray, Tesfay Temnewo, and Mekonen Andemichael, I conducted interviews with, also explained the same understanding as Ahmed Ahmed Al-Qayssi. They said that the civil war became a push factor for the two groups (the PLF and the Aala group) to continue working together and finally merge. The merger process was a gradual phenomenon. Both

groups underwent separate congresses whereby each group elected its leaders. As explained in the preceding chapter, the Aala group held its congress in a place called Tekhli, while the PLF held its congress in a place called Embahra. Both places were in eastern Eritrea. The congresses the two groups held is explained in the preceding chapter. After their separate congresses and having elected their leaders, many new volunteers joined the groups. Most of the new volunteers came from the highlands and joined the Aala group. The volunteers were mostly Christians, therefore, the Muslim dominated Field for the EWI began to change in terms of religious demography.

According to veterans Ahmed Al-Qayssi, Idris Omar Beriray, Tesfay Temnewo, and Mekonen Andemichael, in October 1972, representatives of the Embahra group and the Tekhli group met in a place called Geheteb and elected a joint administrative committee composed of nine leaders. They also established several departments to run the day-to-day activities. The Departments were: information and political education, finance and supply, health, and military and intelligence (Pool, 2001: 74). Tesfay Temnewo, a veteran of the EWI who joined the Aala group in 1972, in the interview I conducted with him said, “after the Gehteb meeting, the Tekhli group was called PLF-2”. While the coordination of activities proceeded between the two factions, a movement of critics occurred within the PLF-2. In 1973, a democratic movement, later dubbed *menqaa* a Tigrinya word for bat, shook the leadership of PLF-2. The term ‘*menqaa*’ believed to have been first uttered by one of the centralist elements (those who wanted power concentrated at the central leadership) called Naizghi Kiflu. He used the word ‘*menqaa* or bat’ in a meeting to describe how the fighters, who criticized the leadership met in hiding. Thereafter, the group was identified as ‘*menqaa*’ (interview I conducted with veteran of the EWI, Mekonen Andemichael Berhane who joined the Aala group in 1972).

The movement was linked to the influx of new recruits to PLF-2. Most of the new recruits were university students, high school graduates, and peasants from the rural highlands.

The fighters in the PLF-2 were natives of the Eritrean highlands. The Eritrean highlands is divided into three provinces (Hamassien, Akel-Guzzai, and Seraye). Some of the fighters who were natives of Hamasien province and some who were natives of Akele-Guzzai province blamed each other of being sectarian regionalist. The core leadership of PLF-2, which broke away from the ELF and was elected at the Tekhli meeting in August 1971, considered the *menqaa* movement a threat to its power. Critics were dubbed ‘reactionaries’ and ‘right wing’. They were arrested, tortured, and killed. According to veterans Ahmed Al-Qayssi and Tesfay Temnewo, the struggle between the critics and the core leadership continued from mid-1973 to mid-1974. The issues raised by the movement included violation of rights of each individual fighter. Tesfay Temnewo and Mekonen Andemichael shared the same explanation on how the fighters, who criticized the centralist leadership, were badly treated by the centralist leaders. The bad treatment involved harsh punishment, arrest, and disappearance. The issues that were raised also included administration problems. The criticism included about the undemocratic nature of the leadership. It also included health care issues, military and issues of logistics and supply (interviews I conducted with veterans Idris Omar Beriray, Tesfay Temnewo, and Mekonen Andemichael).

The *menqaa* crisis marked a birth of a highly centralized and militant leadership within the PLF-2. At the centre of the highly centralized and militant leadership, there was the founder of the Aala group called Isaias Afwerki. Therefore, it is imperative to briefly describe Isaias Afwerki’s ascendancy to power before delving into his role in building the highly centralist and militant leadership of PLF-2. Isaias Afwerki joined the ELF in September 1966 (Connel, 2005: 28). During the time Isaias Afwerki joined the ELF, the ELA in the Field had already been divided into Zones (the MAZ). Isaias Afwerki was one of five fighters who were sent by the SC to China to receive a six-month military and political training in March 1967 (Dandan, 1995: 190). After the completion of their training, they returned to the field of the struggle in the Field.

Five of them were assigned as political commissars in the five Zones in the mid-1968. Isaias Afwerki was assigned to the Fifth Zone (interviews I conducted with veterans Mohammedberhan Belata, Idris Omar Beriray, and Ahmed Al-Qayssi). However, the situation in the Field was tense due to the activities of the reform movement, and the first meeting (the Anseba meeting) called by the reform movement was underway. Isaias Afwerki arrived in his place of assignment just before the Orotta meeting begun and attended the meeting representing the Fifth Zone (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 24-25).

The Ororta meeting (aka the Anseba meeting) was held from 11 to 18 September 1968. In the meeting, a trio union known as the Tripartite Union, where the Third Zone, the Fourth Zone, and the Fifth Zone declared their united front. They also elected - from among the representatives - a temporary leadership composed of twelve fighters. Isaias Afwerki was elected as one of the twelve leaders (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 29-30). It was his first appearance in the leadership circle and first ascendancy to power. Veteran Mohammedberhan Belata, one of the leaders who was elected in the congress, in the interview I conducted with him explained that in August 1969 in the Adobha congress at which the five Zones convened, Isaias Afwerki was elected to become one of the 38-member leadership that was known as the Provisional General Command (PGC). Within the PGC, Isaias Afwerki and Mohammedberhan Blata were among those who were assigned in a committee of political affairs composed of six fighters under the leadership of a fighter called Mohammed Ibrahim Checkeeni.

Mohammedberhan Belata explained that after they had been assigned to the political affairs section the committee of political affairs divided itself into different geographical areas of Eritrea. Isaias was one of those who were assigned to cover the highlands. Meanwhile, the ELF military squads in Kassala, Sudan, were involved in arresting and killing of whoever (from fighters in the ELF and/or volunteers who were ready to join the ELF) they thought was an Ethiopian spy. Two prominent highlanders called Kidane Kiflu and Wolday Ghidey were also

killed in the crisis. Consequently, many fighters abandoned the ELF and surrendered to the Ethiopian embassy in Sudan. In such developments and in a situation where disagreements ensued within the PGC as discussed above, Isaias Afwerki declared that he was no longer part of the ELF.<sup>95</sup> Ahmed Al-Qaysi, veteran of the EWI, explained that after Isaias Afwerki declared that he was no longer part of the ELF, he started to build his power base. He camped in a place called Aala, as explained in the preceding chapter. His group was later to be identified as the Ala group (aka *Selfi Natsinet*, translated independence party). Yet, the group was also identified as “the Isaias group”, particularly by the ELF leadership; because he was a PGC member of the ELF and was the one declared the separation and led the group.

Isaias Afwerki, as an individual leader, had good contact with some of the leaders of the SodohEila group such as Ramadan Mohammednur. After it held its first meeting in SodohEila in July 1970, the SodohEila group took an initiative to contact with the Aala group led by Isaias Afwerki. The SodohEila group sent 13-member group searching for Isaias Afwerki to provide help and establish contact. Idris Omar Beriray, a veteran of the EWI, who was one of the 13-member SodohEila group that were sent to contact the Aala group, explained to me in the interview I conducted with him that Isaias Afwerki and his eight-member group had already moved closer to the Semhar region in an area known locally as “*semenawi baHri*”. Veterans Mohammedberhan Belata and Ahmed Al-Qayssi believed that the relationship between Isaias Afwerki and Ramadan Mohammednur went back in 1967 and 1968 when both received military training in China. Both Blata and Qayssi believed that Isaias and Ramadan shared many aspects of the Chinese Maoist thinking they learnt during their training. One of such thinking was how to rule a revolution through forming an internal organization within the main organization. This internal organization was known as “secret party” which meant no one knew about its existence except members of the party.

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<sup>95</sup> I conducted interview with veterans Mohammedberhan Belata, interview conducted on 08 March 2021; Idris Omar Bireray, interview conducted 11 March 2021.



Therefore, the role of Isaias Afwerki in building highly centralized and militant leadership was empowered by the reverence he gained in Aala group, which he founded and led, and his personal contacts with the PLF-1. In the PLF-1, he had long time comrades such as Rammadan Mohammednur, and some of the PLF-1 leaders thought he was a talented fighter who deserved support. The first step towards consolidating the highly centralized and militant leadership was forming a “secret party”. Forming a “secret party” also served as a mechanism to strengthen the ties between the Aala group and the PLF-1. Ahmed Al-Qayssi, a veteran of the EWI who joined the SodoHEila group in early 1971, attended the Embahra meeting of the PLF-1, and became one of the PLF-1 leaders, in the interview I conducted with him explained how the Aala group and the PLF-1 leaders met to establish a shared internal organization (“secret party”) that would guide their groups. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1971, both the PLF-1 and the Aala group formed a joint “secret party” in a place called Ghedem in eastern Eritrea. Among those who attended the meeting were Mohammed Ali Omaru, Isaias Afwerki, Abubakar Mohammed Hassen, Ibrahim Afa, Mesfun Hagos, Ali Sayid Abdalla, Mahmoud Ahmed Sherifo, Hassan Mohammed Amir, Ahmed Tahir Baduri, Ahmed Al-Qayssi, and others (Connel, 2005: 117). Ramadan Mohammednur was abroad, but he was part of the idea (Ahmed Al-Qayssi, my interview).

However, there was difference between the Aala group (later PLF-2) and the PLF-1 in leadership style. As stipulated above, PLF-2 was heading towards consolidating a highly centralized and militant leadership style, while PLF-1 open and democratic. An example of the democratic nature of PLF-1 was that it solved its internal problems with discussions. Ahmed Al-Qayssi gives an example that after the SodohEila meeting of June – July 1970, disagreement erupted among the different components of the group as explained in the preceding chapter. The Sahel group led by Abu-Tayara, the Semhar group, the Afar group, and the highlander group. Disagreement over selecting base area ensued between the Sahel group and the rest. The

Sahel group departed the group as a sign of disagreement. No incident of clash occurred because of the disagreement. There was attempt of using force against each other. Later, the disagreement was solved through discussions. To the contrary, the leadership of the Aala group, which was led by Isaias Afwerki, was centralist and militant in nature. The centralist and militant nature of the leadership appeared as early as the emergence of the group in 1970. Personal clashes had already started in the first meeting of the group that it held in a place called Tekhli at the end of 1971. According to the interviews I conducted with veterans Tesfay Temnewo and Mekonen Andemichael, a clash ensued, which later took sectarian form, between two leadership members of the Aala group. The two leadership members were called Tewelde Iyob and Solomon Woldemaryam. Such personal clashes were deliberately ignored and were ill handled by Isaias Afwerki, the chairman. Later, personal quarrels and clashes were entangled with issues raised by the democratic elements (the menqaa, as described above) within the group. Problems were not solved. Instead, critics were arrested, tortured, and disappeared (from my interview with Tesfay Temnewo and Mekonen Andemichael).

Between April 1971 and 1975, PLF-1 and PLF-2 strengthened their relationships and consolidated their forces. Osman Saleh Sabbe served as a joint foreign mission for both groups. However, in 1975, a disagreement ensued over the role of Osman Saleh Sabbe. In September 1975, Osman Saleh Sabbe attended a meeting with the ELF in Khartoum and agreed on behalf of the PLF-1 and PLF-2 to form a unity front. On 12 November 1975, the leaders of PLF-2 and PLF-1 met at a place called Zager and rejected Sabbe's agreement. The conflict between Sabe and the PLF groups resulted in Sabbe's split and forming his own new organization (Markakis, 1987: 139). After his separation, Sabbe appeared to retain the name ELF-PLF, which was the original name endorsed at the SodhEila meeting of June – July 1970. Ahmed Al-Qayssi, a veteran of the EWI, in the interview I conducted with him puts the conflict between the PLF groups and Osman Saleh Sabbe as difference in political viewpoints. In that, he identified the

difference on how the foreign mission should be constructed. The PLF leaders in the Field sought a different foreign mission approach that covered a wider world, while Sabbe's approach focussed on the Arab and Muslim World.

Osman Saleh Sabbe's departure was not without repercussion. Veterans Idris Omar Beriray and Mekonen Andemichael in the interviews I conducted with identified two major repercussions. One, that most of the Sahel group (aka as the Marya group) members under the leadership of Abu-Tayara and Omer Damer joined Sabbe's new organization. From the explanations presented in the preceding chapter, it can be inferred that the concern of the Sahel group was domination by the Red Sea groups and the highlanders. Therefore, they opted to leave with Osman Saleh Sabbe. Second, that filling the position of foreign mission that was occupied by Osman Saleh Sabbe, who was well-connected and experienced, was challenging.

Veteran Mekonen Andemichael in the interview I conducted with explained that after the departure of the Sahel group, the size of fighters of PLF-1 diminished. Besides, there were not many new recruits joined the group. On the side of PLF-2, the new recruits continued to increase from time to time. Therefore, the development on the ground demanded quick leadership re-structuring of the joint organization. For the centralized and militant leadership of PLF-2, the situation became more conducive than ever to tighten the grip of power and expand further. For the diminished (in size) PLF-1, it meant only the remaining members who held top positions in the joint forces continued. PLF-1 was composed of natives of the red sea region, while PLF-2 was composed of the highlanders. The expansion of PLF-2 was related to the influx of new volunteers from the highlands who joined the armed struggle. The new recruits increased the number of PLF-2 fighters and enabled it to expand its powerbase.

A factor that contributed to the influx of the highlanders to join the armed struggle was the political crisis unfolded in Ethiopia in 1974. A popular uprising that involved the students, the teachers, the trade unions, and the military erupted in Ethiopia that toppled the monarch of

the country, king Haile Selassie (Tiruneh, 2009: 63-64). Two decades earlier (1952), Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia, and a decade later (1962) it was annexed to Ethiopia under the reign of king Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, as explained in the preceding chapters. After the removal of the king through the 1974 revolution, a government that claimed to have been ‘Marxist’ took power in Ethiopia. However, its policy towards Eritrea became worse than its predecessor. I conducted interviews with veterans of the EWI (Colonel Tsegu Fessahie, Lt. Colonel Khaled Aberra, Awelkhair Abdulhafeez, Said Mohammed Said, and Abdu Suleiman), who were students in Asmara during the time at which the Ethiopian ‘Marxist’ declared a policy of terror against the Eritrean youth explained on how things developed. Asmara, the capital of Eritrea was affected badly by the reign of terror of the ‘Marxist’ Ethiopian government led by Mengistu Hailemariam. Many youths were arrested, tortured, and killed. Therefore, it left no choice for the Eritreans but to join the armed struggle. As a result, many highlanders flocked to the field of armed struggle.

The influx of the youth to the Field led to the re-structuring of the PLF leadership to fit the expanded capacity of the organization. The highly centralized and militant leadership of the PLF-1 opted to put under strict control any critics and opposition. The PLF-2 established a “secret party”, as stipulated above, to control the internal situation of the organization. Former member of the “secret party”, veterans Ahmed Al-Qayssi, Colonel Tsegu Fessahaye, and Yemane Tekhlegerghis in the interviews I conducted with them, explained that the “secret party” was first known as the Eritrean People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), which later changed to the Eritrean Socialist Party (ESP).<sup>96</sup> In 1976, the secret party of the joint PLF-2 and PLF-1 convened its first secret congress at a place called Merara in the environs of Asmara. 150 fighters attended the secret congress of the secret party. Isaias Afwerki, from PLF-2, was

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<sup>96</sup> I conducted interviews with the former members of the secret party: veteran freedom fighter Ahmed Al Qayssi, interview conducted 09 March 2021; veteran freedom fighter Colonel Tsegu Fessahia, interview conducted 20 August 2021; veteran freedom fighter Yemane Tekhlegerghis, interview conducted 21 August 2021

elected Secretary General while Ramadan Mohammednur, from PLF-1, was elected assistant to the Secretary General. Others such as Haile Woldetensae (Dure), PLF-2, and Alamin Mohammed Saeed, PLF-1, were assigned as heads of ideological department and cadre school of the joint organization (Connel, 2005: 150). Based on previous explanations, it can be inferred that the Merara congress of the secret party cemented the unity of PLF-1 and PLF-2.

In January 1977, PLF-1 and PLF-2 joint organizational first congress was held. A united organization called the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) was formed. Veterans Ahmed Al-Qayssi, Yemane Tekhlegerghis, and Colonel Tsegu Fessahaye, explained that in the January 1977 first congress of the EPLF, 315 participants attended. About 75% of the attendees were freedom fighters while the rest were representatives of mass organizations who were affiliated to the PLF-1 and PLF-2. In the congress, a central committee composed of 37 permanent and 6 alternate members were elected. The central committee in its turn elected a 13-member political bureau (Pool, 2001: 83-84).<sup>97</sup> The 13-member political bureau were part of the core leadership of the PLF-1 and the PLF-2, while the central committee was composed of many new fighters who joined the organization after 1972 (ibid). Among the seven elected PLF-2 political bureau members, the three joined the struggle between 1971 – 1972. From the six elected PLF-1 political bureau members there were no newcomers (my interview with veteran Ahmed Al-Qaysi).

## **7.9 ELF vs EPLF Power Dynamics**

The EPLF emerged as the final organizational structure of the joint forces of PLF-1 and PLF-2, as discussed above. PLF-1 and PLF-2 emerged because of the fierce power struggle

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<sup>97</sup> According to David Pool (2001: 83 – 84), the 13-member political bureau were seven from PLF-2 and six from PLF-1: 1) Isaias Afwerki 2) Haile Woldetensae 3) Mesfun Hagos 4) Petros Solomon 5) Sebhat Ephrem 6) Berhane Gherezgiher 7) Ogbe Abraha 8) Ramadan Mohammednur 9) Mahmoud Ahmed Sherifo 10) Ali Sayid Abdalla 11) Ibrahim Afa 12) Alamin Mohammed Saeed 13) Mohammed Saeed Bareh.

ensued within the ELF. Between 1972 and 1975, the ELF attempted to eliminate the breakaway factions to prevent emergence of competitor forces. However, after 1975, the strength of the joint forces of PLF-1 and PLF-2 discouraged the ELF from pursuing its policy of eliminating them. In addition, as discussed above, the disagreement between the leadership of PLF and Osman Saleh Sabbe – at the end of 1975 – led Sabbe to form a separate organization. Therefore, the existence of rival armed organizations in the Field of the EWI became a reality the ELF had to accept. After 1976, the ELF was no longer the sole armed organization in the Field of the EWI.

The ELF held its first national congress in November 1971, as is pointed out in the preceding chapter. The congress marked an entrance into a different era for the ELF under younger generation of leadership. The younger generation of leadership in both the ELF and the PLF factions had similar political outlook on several issues. One of the similarities was their plan to establish internal organization (aka “secret party”) within the main organization, as described above. The aim of the internal organization (from now on referred as “secret party”) was to serve as a vanguard of the struggle. The ELF’s “secret party” was formed in November 1968 (Markakis, 1987: 128). As discussed above, the founders of the ELF “secret party” considered themselves ‘Marxist Leninist’ nationalists, the same way the PLF leadership did. They were ambitious younger and educated generation. Mohammedberhan Belata, veteran of the EWI cited above, in the interview I conducted with him said that the ELF “secret party” was called the Eritrean Democratic Working Peoples Party (aka the Labour Party (LP)). The LP aimed to thwart sectarian politics and build nationalist outlook. One way of achieving its aim was through attaining leadership positions in the main organization’s structures. To that end, the LP campaigned for likeminded leftists to be elected in the ELF’s congresses (Markakis, 1987: 128-129). The emergence of the LP within the ELF manifested a transformation of power

from the older leadership – that was trapped in sectarian politics – to ambitious nationalist younger leadership.

According to Markakis (1987: 128-129), the LP considered itself as a progressive socialist party. The LP organizational structure consisted of a central committee and political bureau. It also had cells in all branches of the ELF. The LP's existence was never a secret. The LP was rather a loose internal networking of likeminded fighters who strove to control the ELF and lead the struggle for Eritrea's independence and many non-member fighters knew about its existence (ibid). In comparison, the EPLF's EPRP/ESP was not known except by its members. Lt Colonel Khaled Abbera, a veteran of the EWI who joined the PLF in 1975 and was recruited as a member of the EPRP/ESP by the end of 1980s, in the interview I conducted with him explained that except the fighters who were members, none of the rest of the EPLF fighters knew about the existence of the EPRP/ESP until it was officially dissolved in the eve of Eritrea's independence in 1991. A firm control by the centralized and militant leadership of the PLF helped keep the EPRP/ESP hidden from non-members. Two factors can be identified that enabled to keep the EPRP/ESP hidden. One, that the highly centralized and militant nature of leadership. Second, that the founders of the EPRP/ESP remained its core leaders and the core leaders of the main organization (the PLF/EPLF) till 1991.

However, both organizations were not safe from internal crisis. As explained above, the *menqaa* movement shook the nascent PLF-2 in early 1970s. Similarly, in the ELF a movement dubbed "*falool*: translated anarchist" shook the ELF in the mid-1970s. The *falool* movement was linked to the wave of new recruits to the armed struggle in 1974 and 1975, who challenged the leadership of the ELF. Veterans of the EWI I conducted interviews with (Awelkhair Abdulhafeez, Abdu Suleiman, and Said Mohammed Said), who joined the ELF between 1974 and 1976, share the same understanding of the situation: Most of the new recruits came from the highlands of Eritrea. They included university students, high school graduates, and peasants

from the rural areas. Prior to the influx, the fighters in the ELF were predominantly Muslims. While the new recruits from the highlands were predominantly Christians. Therefore, Muslim – Christian balance occurred at the level of file and rank. However, since the newcomers were younger and more ambitious in their political outlooks, a clash with the leadership occurred. Besides, most of newcomers had ill perception of the ELF before they joined the struggle. They perceived that the sectarian problems that prevailed in the ELF persisted. They blamed the leadership for every defection they encountered. Based on that perception, the ambitious newcomers considered the ELF leadership weak and a failure. Given the lenient and open approach of the leadership, it was obvious things would develop to a situation whereby the ambitious newbies became uncontrollable, and the consequence was the *falool* movement.

Meanwhile, the three Eritrean Liberation Organizations mentioned above (mainly the ELF and the EPLF) intensified the EWI against the Ethiopian forces in Eritrea. Except for few towns and the Capital City, the Eritreans liberated most parts of Eritrea in 1977 (Pool, 2001: 139; Iyob, 1995: 119). However, by the end of 1978, due to large military assistance, mainly, provided by the Soviets to the newly established ‘Marxist’ government of Ethiopia, the Eritrean forces were forced to withdraw from most of the territories they liberated (Pool, 2021: 143-144). The issue of a complete liberation of Eritrea was put in question. Gradually, mobilization of resources and recruiting new fighters started to dwindle. On the opposite side, the Ethiopian military reinforced itself and heightened its military offensives against the dwindling Eritrean armed factions (interviews I conducted with veterans Mohammedberhan Blata, Idris Omar Beriray, and Ahmed Al-Qayssi).

However, both the EPLF and the ELF had organized large civic organizations abroad who supported them. The civic organizations were known as mass organizations. They included associations such as women’s associations, students’ associations, farmers associations, and the larger mass that served as power base for each organization (ibid). The mass organizations



served as powerbase for both the ELF and the EPLF included the Eritrean refugees in Sudan and different countries of the world. One aspect of the 30-year long EWI was production of hundreds of thousands of Eritrean refugees. The Ethiopian Military administration in Eritrea, in its attempts to foil the EWI, followed a policy known as “scorched earth”. According to An African Watch Reporter (1991: 43), the term “scorched earth” was taken from a vow an Ethiopian assigned governor in Eritrea called Asrate Kassa said regarding his plan about how to quell the EWI. He reportedly said that he would leave Eritrea as bare as his bald head. That was to say, the intention of the Ethiopian Military administration in Eritrea was to burn down villages and towns of Eritrea, kill people and force the survivors to flee their country. Tens of thousands of Eritreans fled their homes and sought refuge in Sudan. In addition to the scorched earth policy, tens of thousands of Eritreans also fled their home-country due the intensity of the war in their areas. Besides, during the 1978 withdrawal of the ELF and the EPLF from the territories they liberated, also tens of thousands left their homes to other countries, most of them to Sudan. Therefore, by the time the EPLF and the ELF armed forces were cornered in defensive trenches, the mass organizations were getting bigger. Both the EPLF and the ELF intensified their activities through mobilizing the Eritreans abroad. Simultaneously, both organizations were involved in building several administrative structures in their respective strongholds (Pool, 2001: 142-143).

Besides, both the ELF and the EPLF were engaged in attempts to form a united front. However, the nature of the relationships between them was fierce power struggle. As described in the preceding chapter, both organizations often proposed meetings to discuss about unity, but they often searched for a reason to disband it. Therefore, practically it was unachievable to unite a highly centralized and militant leadership with a loose and lenient leadership. The best example of unification attempt between the two organizations was the meeting that was held in October 1977 in Khartoum. Both organizations agreed to “form a joint supreme political

command and joint committees for military and other activities” (Markakis, 1987: 144). However, the agreement was not sincere since the formula of unity of both parties did not match. There was a stalemate on implementing the agreement. Sporadic clashes of armed units of both organizations started to erupt here and there (Pool, 2001: 146). What followed was a repeat of the 1972 situation of civil war; at that time, it was the ELF which became intolerant of the breakaway groups and decided to eliminate them by force. In 1979, it was the breakaway groups (the EPLF) which decided to eliminate the ELF. It marked an entrance into a second civil war during the EWI.

At that point, an alliance between the EPLF and an Ethiopian opposition armed faction called the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) appeared on the scene. The TPLF was an armed faction from a province of Tigray, north Ethiopia, which fought against the central Ethiopian ‘socialist’ government. The alliance between the EPLF and the TPLF went back to 1975 at the time the latter was formed. The EPLF contributed to the formation of the TPLF. The alliance between the EPLF and the TPLF also effected in launching joint war against the Ethiopian ‘socialist’ government (Pool, 2001: 148). In August 1980, the EPLF - at which the TPLF joined by its side - launched a military offensive against the ELF. The war marked end of the ELF. The war continued till August 1981 when the ELF evacuated the Field in Eritrea and entered Sudan. In Sudan, the Sudanese military forced most of the ELF forces to surrender and their weapons were taken from them (Abdalla Idris, 2016: 114-114). Once in the land of Sudan, the ELF leadership failed to rectify the internal fractures of the organization. Instead, feud ensued. Sectarianism re-surfaced. Consequently, the ELF fell apart and imploded into smaller factions. A faction, which called itself ELF-Central Leadership established a link with the EPLF in the Field and agreed to unite with it. In March 1987, when the EPLF conducted its organizational second congress, the ELF-Central Leadership was officially united into the

structures of the EPLF (Burgess and Cliffe, 2007: 107). The rest of the ELF factions continued in Sudan without progress of re-gaining power.

Therefore, it can be inferred that unlike the ELF in 1972, the EPLF in 1980/1 succeeded in defeating its rival, the ELF. After two decades (1961 – 1981) of fierce and bloody internal power struggle, an organization called EPLF emerged as the winner under a centralized and militant leadership led by the secretive EPRP/ESP. The ELF lost the whole power struggle due to its loose and lenient leadership. Between 1982 to 1991, the EPLF, as the winner of the power struggle, dominated the EWI. On 24 May 1991, the EPLF succeeded in liberating the whole Eritrea and captured Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. Two years later in April 1993, the people of Eritrea held a referendum “for” or “against” independence under the sponsorship of the United Nations (UN). The result was 98.5% for independence (UN Document, 1993, A/48/283). The EPLF transformed itself into a provisional government of Eritrea. The centralized and militant leadership of the EPLF did not allow the ELF factions to participate in the post-independent nation-building process. However, those who were willing to join as individuals were given some nominal positions in the government structures. The centralized and militant nature of the EPLF leadership did not transform itself into an inclusive governing system. To the contrary the leader, Isaias Afwerki emerged as a powerful dictator and arrested opposition, including his long-time comrades who were his aide sine the formation of the PLF in early 1970s.

## **7.10 Conclusion**

The power relationships among various Eritrean freedom-fighter individuals, groups, and organizations during the 30-year EWI underwent several changes. The power relationships that prevailed since the beginning of the War marked transformation of power from older

generation of leadership to younger generation of leadership. The older leadership manifested an amalgam of three tiers of political leaders. The first tier was composed of veteran politicians who were part of the leadership that prevailed during the 1940s and 1950s nationalist movements in Eritrea. The second tier was composed of Eritreans who served in the Sudanese Military Forces (SMF). The third tier was composed of exiled Eritrean students based in Cairo, Egypt. The components of the older generation of leadership of the EWI prevailed in the years between 1961 to 1965. In 1965, the Eritrean Liberation Army (ELA) was divided into Zones referred as Military Administrative Zones (MAZ). It prevailed from 1965 to 1969. The younger generation of leadership emerged during the MAZ period. The younger generation of leadership included those who were sent by the Supreme Council (SC) of the ELF to different countries to receive military and political training.

In this study, the power relationships that occurred over the period of the EWI are divided into five categories. First, that a clash over power occurred among key individual leaders within the SC. The individual power struggle was compounded by tribal and regional affinities during the MAZ period. Second, that a clash over power occurred among former soldiers of the SMF. The former soldiers in the SMF clashed over who should replace the ELA pioneer commander, Hamid Idris Awate, after he died in April 1962. Third, that a clash over power occurred after the first batch of fighters (from the exiled Eritrean students based in Cairo) who received military training in Syria and were dispatched as commanders of Zones at equal leadership positions with the former Soldiers in the SMF. Their clash was on whose military skills was superior. It was also compounded by tribal and regional affinities. Fourth, that a clash over power occurred after the younger generation of leadership who received military and political training in several countries were assigned into several top positions. The younger generation of leadership was composed of ambitious nationalist leaders who embarked on reform movement that put them in clashes with the SC and the older generation of leadership

and finally ended up with the implosion of the ELF. Fifth, that a clash over power occurred among the younger generation of leadership because of older problems they inherited and that they failed to resolve and move on. Therefore, some of them opted to form separate organizations that sparked civil war. The civil war ended with the formation of armed organizations that became rival to the ELF. The main ones were called PLF-1 and PLF-2 which finally merged to form the EPLF. Therefore, the power struggle finally took a form of organizational clash between the ELF and the EPLF. The difference between the EPLF and the ELF was leadership style. The ELF leadership was lenient and 'democratic', while the EPLF leadership was highly centralized and militant. At the end of the EWI, the ELF lost the struggle, while the EPLF emerged triumphantly and liberated Eritrea in 1991. Although the EPLF transformed itself from a guerrilla armed movement to government, its centralized and militant nature of leadership has not changed. Calls for reform and transformation for constitutional government have been silenced ever since.

## **Chapter 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

This concluding chapter highlights the political economy approach to the Eritrean War of Independence (EWI) in the context of power relationships. The main objective of this study was to examine the contribution of the EWI to power relationships among various individuals and groups in Eritrea. In this study, power relationship has been used to imply making and administration of power during the EWI. The making and administration of power during the EWI underlines the theoretical framework this study has come up with. This study has combined relatively new approaches to the political economy of war and state in Africa from historical materialist perspectives.

To understand how the making and administration of power during the EWI affected the power relationships among various Eritrean political forces during the EWI, this study has examined War period divisions that occurred during the War. In this study, the divisions that occurred during the EWI has been contextualized as power struggle. Therefore, power struggle has been treated as the major factor that affected the process of making and administration of power during the EWI. In other words, the process of making and administration of power manifested itself in the power struggle that unfolded during the War.

The objective of the Eritrea's 30-year War was to achieve independence. Independence in this regard was liberating Eritrea from Ethiopian occupation. Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea had its roots in the failure of decolonization process in Eritrea. Eritrea was colonized by Italy from 1890 to 1941. In 1941, Italy was defeated by the British, a member of the Allied Forces of

World War II. The British Military Colonial rule over Eritrea was compounded by Ethiopia's interest of getting access to the Red Sea outlet because Ethiopia was landlocked. The Allied forces were also involved in derailing the process of decolonization in Eritrea. They favoured Ethiopia over Eritrea because Ethiopia was a partner to the Allied Forces in defeating Italy in the Horn of Africa (Tesfai, 2001: 132-133). Eritrea's right to self-determination was compromised. The support of the Western countries in favour of Ethiopia was determinant in compromising Eritrea's right to self-determination. In December 1950, under the Resolution known as 390 A (V), the UN decided on federating Eritrea under the Ethiopian Crown king Haile Selassie. However, Ethiopia was not interested in the Federal system. It aimed to annex Eritrea into its territory. Therefore, through a gradual violation of the Federal system, Ethiopia officially annexed Eritrea in 1962. Eritreans, aware of Ethiopia's intention of annexing Eritrea initiated peaceful resistance in mid-1950s. The peaceful resistance failed to bring solution, which led to the start of the EWI in September 1961.

The objective of this study was not about what the EWI aimed to achieve. The objective of this study was to examine the political economy aspects of the War. The political economy aspect of the EWI was examined using the political economy approach to the War. The political economy of the War refers to the making and administration of power that occurred in the form of power struggle during the 30-year War period. In this study, the 30-year War period has been divided into three important stages for the purpose of examining the patterns and developments of the power struggle unfolded during the War. The first stage comprised the years that spanned from the formation of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1961 to its implosion in 1969. This stage was the beginning of the EWI and the veterans who joined during that period had experiences, which reflect the given period, as explained in chapters 6 and 7. The second stage comprised the period of implosion at which splinter groups emerged. The period of implosion that spanned from 1969 to 1975 was a period during which a new leadership emerged, and the

nature of power struggle changed from sectarian politics – based on ethnicity and religion – to organizational rivalry. The third stage comprised a critical transformation of the splinter group (the EPLF) into a strong and formidable organization. The EPL finally pushed the ELF out of the Field of the War and emerged triumphant. In 1991, the EPLF transformed itself into a government of an independent State of Eritrea.

During the first stage of the Eritrean war of independence, the political power structure of the ELF comprised three groups. Exiled Eritrean students, former veteran politicians from the 1940s and 1950s Eritrean politics, and Eritreans who served in the Sudanese Military Forces (SMF). The students were influenced by the nationalist movements that engulfed the developing countries. The students opposed Ethiopia's violation of the Federal system that tied both Eritrea and Ethiopia. The older politicians from the 1940s and 1950s Eritrean politics left Eritrea because they also opposed Ethiopia's infringement and violation of the Federal system. The former veteran politicians were targeted and became victims of assassination attempts by the Ethiopian security agents that were based in Eritrea. Similarly, the Eritreans who served in the Sudanese Military could not tolerate Ethiopia's encroachment to annex Eritrea. Therefore, the three groups joined together and formed the ELF.

The students and the veteran politicians were the backbone of the political aspects of the formation of the ELF. They formed a political leadership of the ELF that was called Supreme Council (SC). The SC worked hard through diplomatic campaigns to get support for the EWI. It received support from countries such as Syria, Iraq, and China. Personal power struggle ensued among the SC key leaders that spilled over to the army in the Field of war. The Eritreans who served in the SMF played a leading role in building the Army that was situated in the Field of War in its early years. The former Sudanese soldiers disagreed about who should replace the pioneer military commander of the army, Hamid Idris Awate after he died. The disagreement amongst the former Sudanese soldiers was resolved by the intervention from



renowned Eritrean elders and the SC leaders. However, the power struggle amongst the military commanders in the field did not end. It continued after the arrival of new commanders who received military training in Syria. The power struggle was between the former Sudanese soldiers and the soldiers who received military training in Syria. Although it seemed that the conflict was about military skills, tribal and regional tendencies were reflected.

The explosive situation of the first stage was the establishment of Zonal Command system. The establishment of Zonal Command system encouraged sectarianism based on tribal, ethnic, religion, and religious affinities. Although the purpose of the Zonal Command system was to enable decentralized system of administrative structure, it created sectarian environment. The fighters who realized the problems that were posed by the Zonal Command System and the failure of the SC in solving the problems initiated a reform movement. The aim of the reform movement was to investigate issues of conflict and present mechanisms that would enable to solve the problems. Three historical meeting were held to discuss the problems and to propose solutions. The proposed mechanisms of resolving the problems included uniting the Zonal Commands under one Central Command, denying Heads and Deputy Heads of the Zonal Commands from being re-elected, and disbanding the SC and substitute it with a leadership that would be situated in the Field inside Eritrea. The proposal of the reform movement was not accepted by many of the fighters. Among those who opposed the proposal was Osman Saleh Sabbe who was one of the key leaders of the SC. He immediately declared his separation and embarked on forming a new political organization. Many other fighters who had various grievances and grudges left the ELF and moved towards forming alternative organization. The breakaway process also involved civil war from 1972 to 1975 whereby the ELF waged war to eliminate the breakaway groups.

This study categorized the second stage as the situation whereby sectarian based power struggle transformed to organizational based power struggle. Although sectarianism did not

disappear, younger generation of leadership who received military and political training abroad strove towards developing a nationalist oriented secular political outlook. The younger generation of leadership considered themselves 'Marxist' oriented. The tendency towards "Marxist" oriented outlook was reflected on both the ELF leadership and the splinter groups. The splinter groups later merged and formed the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF). Both sides labelled each other "reactionary". Therefore, the conflict between the ELF and the EPLF took organizational form.

This study has identified that the difference between the ELF and the EPLF was leadership style. The ELF was lenient and democratic in dealing with the critics and the challenges that surfaced within the organization. The EPLF was highly centralized and militant in dealing with the critics and the challenges surfaced within the organization. The leadership style played significant role in deciding the future of the organizations. The rivalry between the two organizations continued until the EPLF waged a war against the ELF in 1980/81 that marked the removal of the ELF from the Field of the War.

This study has categorized the third stage as the situation whereby the EPLF emerged as the dominant Eritrean armed organization. The EPLF dominated the Field of the EWI after it pushed the ELF out of the Eritrean land to the Sudan in 1981. The EPLF became stronger and in May 1991 it defeated the Ethiopia Armed Forces in Eritrea and liberated Eritrea. The EPLF transformed itself from a guerrilla movement to government. This study has identified that the EPLF has brought with it the leadership style it developed during the EWI. It also marks the contribution of the War to the State that was formed through the War. The leadership style of the EPLF was highly centralized and militant. The government of the newly formed State inherited the nature of leadership (highly centralized and militant) of the EPLF. Consequently, a totalitarian system of governance has developed in Eritrea.

The objective of this study was to examine the political economy aspects of the EWI in the context of power relationships. However, the State that was formed as the result of the War remains a topic for further research. In this regard, the aspect of the State that needs further research involves the effect of the EWI to the nature of the leadership that formed the government of the State of Eritrea. As identified in this study, the leadership that formed the government of the State of Eritrea in 1991 has remained highly centralized and militant. In this study, the nature of the leadership of the EWI has been examined as part of the power struggle that occurred during the War. During the final phase of the EWI, the power struggle took organizational form between the ELF and the ELF. The nature or style of leadership in both organizations was different. The EPLF was led by a highly centralized and militant leadership. To the contrary, the ELF was led by a lenient and democratic leadership. Why? The former won the EWI and formed the new State under the same highly centralized and militant leadership, while the latter lost and was not able to play any role in the newly formed State. Why? These questions need further academic investigation to understand the post-War government of Eritrea.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Certificate



26 February 2021

Mr Mustafa Mohammed Osman Ahmed (202523597)  
School Of Social Sciences  
Howard College

Dear Mr Ahmed,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002393/2021

Project title: The Political Economy of the Eritrean War of Independence 1961 - 1991

Degree: PhD

#### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 08 December 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

This approval is valid until 26 February 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

**All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.**

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

#### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix B: Turnitin Originality Report

[Document Viewer](#)

### Turnitin Originality Report

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## **Appendix C: Informed Consent Form (English)**

### **UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)**

#### **APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants**

### **INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE**

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved.

There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC.

#### **Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research**

Date:

Greeting:

My name is **Mustafa Mohammedosman Ahmed**, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in Durban – South Africa. I am enrolled at the School of Social Sciences to do my PhD research study. My E-mail address is: [aqubam2003@yahoo.com](mailto:aqubam2003@yahoo.com) and my Mobile Phone No is: +46 764376889.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research titled, “The Political Economy of the Eritrean War of Independence 1961 - 1991”. The aim and purpose of this research is to examine the relationships between war, power relationships and state formation in Eritrea. The study is expected to be participated by 20-25 interviewees. Depending upon interviewees availability, interviews will be conducted face-to-face or over the telephone, skype, zoom, Facebook etc. No videos or photos of participants will be taken. The participation is voluntary and that participants may withdraw participation at any point. There are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study. The study is not funded.

The study does not involve any risks. The study will provide no direct benefit for participants. The benefit of this study is an academic contribution to existing literature on the Eritrean war of independence.

Confidentiality of personal information is respected. Information gathered is used solely for this study of academic purpose. The information will be stored in USB audio formats.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number\_\_\_\_\_).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (e-mail: [aqubam2003@yahoo.com](mailto:aqubam2003@yahoo.com) or Mobile Phone: +46 764376889) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

---

## **CONSENT**

I (Name) have been informed about the study entitled “The political Economy of the Eritrean War of Independence 1961 – 1991” by Mustafa Mohammedosman Ahmed.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study (add these again if appropriate).

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed that there is no risk involved and that there is no personal benefit involved.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at (e-mail: [aqubam2003@yahoo.com](mailto:aqubam2003@yahoo.com) or Mobile Phone: +46 764376889).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:



## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form (Tigrinya)

### UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

#### APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

#### INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved.

There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC.

(Translated into Tigrinja language by the Researcher)

Tigrinja Translation of the “Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research”

#### ሓበሬታን ኣብዚ መጽናዕቲ ንምስታፍ ዝምልከት ስምምዕን

ዕለት፡

ሰላምታ፡

ሙስጠፋ መ/ዐ-ስማን ኣሕመድ ይበሃል። ኣብ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ከዋዙሉ-ናታል ናይ ደቡብ ኣፍሪቃ ናይ ዶክተሬት መጽናዕቲ የካይድ ኣለኹ። ናይ ኢመይል ኣድራሻይ፡ [aqubam2003@yahoo.com](mailto:aqubam2003@yahoo.com) ኮይኑ፡ ቴሌፎንይ +46 764376889.

ኣብዚ “ፖለቲካዊ ቁጠባ ሰውራ ኤርትራ 1961 – 1991” ብዝብል ኣርእስቲ ዘካይዶ መጽናዕቲ ንክትሳተፍ/ፊ ትዕደም/ሚ። ዕላማ ናይዚ መጽናዕቲ፡ ኣብ ሞንጎ ኩናት ሰውራ ኤርትራን ምምቕራሕ ስልጣንን ምምስራት መንግስትነትን ዘሎ ዝምድናታት ዝምልከት ኢዩ። እዚ መጽናዕቲ ካብ 20-25 ውልቀ-ሰባት ብመልክዕ ውልቀ ቃለ-መጠይቕ ዝሳተፍዎ ክኸውን ኢዩ። እቲ ቃለ-መጠይቓት ብደረጃ ውልቀ ዝካየድ ኮይኑ፡ ነቲ ውልቀ ተሳታፊይ ብዝጥዕም ይግበር (ማለት ወይ ገጽ-ንገጽ ብምርኻብ ወይ ብቴሌፎን ክኸውን ይኽእል)። ዝኾነ ናይ ቪዲዮ ወይ ስእሊ ናይ ተሳታፊይ ኣይክውሰድን ኢዩ። ተሳታፊነት ብፍቓድ ኮይኑ፡ ተሳታፊይ ኣብ ዝደለዮ ግዜ ክቋርጽ ይኽእል። ንተሳታፊይ ዝወሃብ ዝኾነ ዓይነት መተባበሚ ኣይክህሉን ኢዩ። ምክንያቱ እቲ መጽናዕቲ ብዘይዝኾነ ምወላ ዝካየድ ዘሎ ስለዝኾነ።

ኣብዚ መጽናዕቲ ምስታፍ ዘስዕቦ ዝኾነ ሓዲጋ የለን። ተሳታፊይ ዝረኽቦ ዝኾነ ቀጥታዊ ረብሓውን የለን። እቲ ረብሓ ኣበርክቶ ንመጽናዕታዊ ጽሑፋት ብዛዕባ ሰውራ ኤርትራ ኢዩ ክኸውን።

ዝኾነ ምስጢራውነት ዘድልዮም ውልቃዊ ሓበሬታታት ብምስጢር ናይ ምሓዝ ሓላፍነት ዝተኸብረ ኢዩ። ዝእኩብ ሓበሬታታት ነዚ ዝተጠቐስ ኣካዳምያዊ መዓላ ጥራይ ዝውዕል ኢዩ። እቲ ዝ እኩብ ሓበሬታ ኣብ USB ን audio ን ተኸዚኑ ክዕቀብ ኢዩ።

እዚ መጽናዕቲ ን ኤቲካዊ ሸነሻቱ ዝምልከት ገምጋም ብኮሚቴ መጽናዕትን ኤቲክስን ናይ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ክዋዙልይ-ናታል ክፍሊ ሶሻል ሳይንስ ተገይሩሉ ኢዩ (መወከሲ ቁጽሪ -----).

ዝኾነ ሕቶ ምስዝህሉ፡ ናባይ ብመንገዲ (ኢመይል፡ [aqubam2003@yahoo.com](mailto:aqubam2003@yahoo.com) ወይ ቴሌፎን፡ +46 764376889) ምውካስ ይከኣል።

ወይ'ውን ናብዚ ዝስዕብ ናይቲ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ኣድራሻ ምጽሓፍ ወይ ምድዋል ይከኣል፡

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## ስምምዕ

ኣነ (ስም) ብዛዕባ'ዚ “ፖለቲካዊ ቁጠባ ስውራ ኤርትራ 1961 – 1991” ዝተሰምየ መጽናዕቲ ተሓቢረ ኢዩ።

ዕላማ መጽናዕትን ኣገባብ ኣተሓሳኻኽባ ሓበሬታን ተረዲኡኒ ኣሎ።

ብዛዕባ እቲ መጽናዕቲ ዝምልከት ሕቶታት ንክምልስ ዕድል ተዋሂቡኒ፡ በቲ ነዓይ ዘዕግበኒ መንገዲ ከኣ መልሲ ሂበሉ።

ተሳታፍነተይ ምሉእ ብምሉእ ኣብ ነጻ ፍቓደይ ዝተሞርኮሰ ምዃኑን ኣብ ሞንጎ ከቋርጽ እንተደልየ ከቋርጽ ከምዝኽእልን የረጋግጽን ይእውጅኑ።

ብምስታፊይ ዘጋጥም ሓዲጋ ከምዘየለን፡ ብምስታፊይ ዝረኽቦ ውልቃዊ ረብሓ ከምዘየለን ተሓቢረ ኢዩ።

ነቲ መጽናዕቲ ዝምልከት ዝኾነ ሕቶ ምስ ዝህልወኒ ብቐትታ ነቲ መጽናዕቲ ዘካይድ ዘሎ ብመንገዲ (ኢመይል፡ [aqubam2003@yahoo.com](mailto:aqubam2003@yahoo.com) ወይ ቴሌፎን፡ +46 764376889) ክረኽቦ ከምዝኽእል ፈሊጠ ኣለኹ።

እንተደኣ ከም ተሳታፊ ናይዚ መጽናዕቲ ዝኾነ ሕቶ ኣለኒ ምስቲ ዩኒቨርሲቲ ብቐጥታ በዚ ዝስዕብ ኣድራሻ ክራኽብ ከምዝኽእል'ውን ፈሊጠ ኣለኹ።

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ክታም ተሳታፊ ወይ ተሳታፊት

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## **Appendix E: Interviews conducted by this researcher**

### **SOME PARTS OF SAMPLE INTERVIEW RESPONSES FROM PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Interview with Mohammedberhan Belata**

1. Q. Your name

**Belata** - Mohammedberhan Belata

2. Q. When did you join the EWI?

**Belata** - In 1964

3. Q. What was your first encounter with the freedom fighters who joined before you?

**Belata** - The first time I joined the field, I was deployed to the military unit led by a leader-fighter called Gindifel that was in Moghorayeb in the Barka region. The time was May-June 1964, and earlier there was a war incident in March in Togoruba between the Eritrean fighters and Ethiopian soldiers. When I arrived, the news of the Togoruba war was still fresh. The war was the first military confrontation with Ethiopian soldiers. Before that the military confrontation was with Field Force Eritrean Police who were trained by the British military Administration in Eritrea. The war became tough and Ethiopian side lost many soldiers, therefore, Haile Selassie's government decided to recruit Eritreans to fight us. The Eritreans were trained by the Israelis and were known Kommandis. Anyway, after two to three months in the Field, I was deployed to the ELF's information office in Kassala to help with preparing campaign articles and news. When I arrived in Kassala, Osman Izaz and Mohammed Ali Omaru were there. Omaru was one of the first batch who took military training in Syria in 1963 and came back in early 1964. Those first batch included also Abdelkarim Ahmed, Abdulwahab Fitiwi, Ramadan Mohammednur, etc. They were students in Cairo. The then leadership, Idris Mohammed Adem and Osman Saleh Sabbe managed to convince the Syrian government to support the Eritrean case and the Syrians agreed to give Eritrean fighters

military and political trainings. At that time, governments supported nationalist movements from across the globe based on ideological affinities.

4. Q. How do you explain the implosion of the ELF?

**Belata** - It is important to investigate the formation of the zonal administration. It was a model copied from the Algerian experience. In the first there were four zones and a year later a fifth one was added. During the era of the zonal administration, some of the zonal commanders acted as warlords and they turned their zones into chieftain. The three key leaders of the Supreme Council had different ambitions during the era of the zonal administration. Idris Mohammed Adem was an experienced politician, so he knew how to play it safe. Idris Osman Glawdeous was a student and was ambitious. Osman Sabbe joined a little late; because it was Idris Mohammed Adem and students in Cairo who took the initiative to form the ELF. Anyway, the four zones never coordinated their efforts to confront the enemy. They acted separately. Besides, the political leadership did not have experience in coordinating military and political activities of a revolution. The consequence of the lack of coordination was that the Ethiopians manipulated the situation and were attacking the zones in separation.

When it comes to the ordinary fighters, there was social background differences that at times clashed. For example, those who joined from the highlands would not understand the situation where was dominated by the lowlanders. Language could become an issue of misunderstanding. However, even though there was misunderstandings and conflicts, I do not know of any case that a fighter was persecuted because of their religion (for being Christian, for example). There were fighters who were mistaken for spies of Ethiopia. Those days, the Ethiopian government used to infiltrate the ELF. There were many problems raised and fighters took several actions to solve the problems. There were three major meetings conducted to discuss how to solve the problems. The leaders of the five zones attended the meetings. The third major meeting was known the Adobha congress. In the Adobha congress I was elected as one of the 38-member General Command (GC), which was the new leadership of the ELF. The GC then divided itself into departments. Me, Isaias, Checkini and others were in News department. We planned on how to work on campaign issues and information dissemination. We divided ourselves into two parts of Eritrea. Me and Isaias to cover the highlands and the Red Sea region, while Checkini and others to cover the Western and northern parts of Eritrea.

Meanwhile we needed stationary such as papers, pens, and similar things for our projects. Then I left for Sudan to fetch the stationary things, while Isaias went to Aala in Central Eritrea. While I was on my way to Sudan, news disseminated that two prominent highlanders – namely Kidane Kiflu and Welday Giday – were killed by the ELF in Sudan. That incident became a trigger and Isaias Afwerki declared that he separated from the ELF. Similarly, many breakaway groups emerged.

5. Q. How did the tension between the SC and the GC developed till the implosion of the ELF?

**Belata** - In 1967 I was sent to China with other fighter for military and political training. It was the second round. By then the democratic movement in the field was getting strength. The SC did not have that much control over the movements in the field. Many things unfolded. For example, a leader of zone-3 was made to resign from his leadership position. We returned from China in the middle of the democratic movement crisis. The SC then attempted to intervene by setting up a committee. I was also nominated in the committee, but I refused. Me and those who took training with me went straight to the field to our respective zones. I was in zone-3. By then, zon-3, 4, and 5 had already formed a tripartite unity. Therefore, those of us from the three zones joined the tripartite unity group. Thereafter the time for the Adobha congress was up and we had to attend the congress. Zone-1 and 2 refused in the beginning but later they accepted and the Adobha congress was conducted.

6. Q. How did you get the situation in the field after you returned from your China training?

**Belata** – As I said the situation was very bad. Democratic movements were trying to address and deal with the situation. The SC was in Cairo and did not have any contact with the situation in the field. A major problem was that the structure of the ELF was not clearly defined. Therefore, the leaders in the field were autonomous and were not under any chain-of-command controlling mechanism whatsoever and were free in their actions.

7. Q. How can you explain the various grievances and dissatisfactions arose within the ELF almost from the mid-1960s?

**Belata** – They were many problems. If we take the problems arose with the return of the fighters who received training in Syria and Iraq, it had to do with the nature of the political training they received. Some of the trainees would endorse *Ba'a'ath* party ideology. Yet there was difference between the Iraqi Ba'ath and the Syrian Ba'a'ath. Behind the Ba'ath ideology was Arabization. On the other side, there was the Yemen Socialists who pushed for the socialist ideology. Therefore, all those different ideological orientations had influence among the Eritrean freedom fighters depending on where they received their training. There were Eritrean fighters who were supported by the Iraqi Ba'a'ath Party, they were who were supported by the Syrian Ba'a'ath, there was also some influence from Muslim brotherhood, etc. However, the Labour Party (LP) played crucial role in controlling the situation and proceed to the 1<sup>st</sup> congress of the ELF in 1971. When it comes to the LP, even though it played crucial role till the 1<sup>st</sup> ELF congress, thereafter it was no longer effective. In fact it became corrupt and I can say it's role became negative and contributed to the weakness of the ELF.

If we go back to the zonal era, mainly among the fighters in the field, it is difficult for me to say there was sectarian problems. It was war situation, therefore, there was little chance for sectarian based conflicts. But of course, social and language differences were present. But later with time language differences were gradually solved, the fighters started to understand each other and communicate.

Other issues appeared later. For example, different movements such as the Oobel movement were part of the movements. In late 1960s with the implosion of the ELF, there was some kind of recruiting of fighters to one's side. Osman Saleh Sabbe who had enough resources tried to recruit fighters to his side. In that situation, the Oobel breakaway group established contact with Sabbe. The Oobel movement appeared during late 1960s as far as I understand it. Generally, before 1965 there were no sectarian tendencies. It was later when the ELF grew much bigger and many with political ambitions joined. Then every tribal or so group started demanding political power.

8. Q. How can you define the breakaway factions, and why did the ELF declare it did not tolerate other factions other than itself?

**Belata** – The idea went back to the time when the ELF was infant and the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) formed a military squad after the ELF launched one. Then



the ELF took military action and liquidated the ELM's military squad. Therefore, the idea of not tolerating other groups to emerge continued even when the ELF imploded. Aftermath the Adobha congress, breakaway groups emerged. The ELF dubbed the breakaway groups anti-the-revolution and referred them as enemy of the revolution. In hindsight, I would say the ELF's declaration not to tolerate the breakaway groups was not a right decision.

9. Q - How do you explain the secret party that was formed in the ELF?

**Belata** – When we returned from our China training, the ELF hidden party that was known as Labour Party (LP) was already formed. In the beginning, the members of the LP were few, such as Azain Yassin, Mahmoud Mohammed Saleh, Saleh Iyay, Mohammed Ali Ibrahim, Abdelkader Ramadan, etc. When we arrived from China, Azain, Saleh Iyay, and Mahmoud contacted me and we talked about my training in China. Then they explained to me that they formed a hidden Party known as LP. I asked them if they discussed about it with those who took training in China in the first batch before they formed the Party. They replied they did. They said, among them were Checkini and Ahmed Omar who accepted the idea. But Isaias left for the field soon before they met him. Therefore, they said I could contact him and discuss with him about the Party. At that time, our zones were merged as Tripartite unity and were headed to the Adobha congress. Anyway, I met Isaias and asked him if he had any information about forming hidden Party. He explained to me about an attempt made and that Sabbe and co did not accept the theory that emanated from China. He said that they told the Chinese that they accepted the idea of forming hidden Party, but they were not serious about it. Therefore, Isaias said nothing could be done about it. But he said that him, Ramadan, and Checkini agreed to work on it. Then I told him that the Party was formed, and I was assigned to inform him about the formation of the Party. He said, it was good to know, but there was no need to rush about it. First let's try to work on reforming the bad situation the revolution underwent. Anyway, later after the breakaway, Isaias and his fellow breakaway groups formed their own hidden Party in their new organization.

## **Interview with Ahmed Al-Qayssi**

1. Q. Your name

**Qayssi** - My name is Ahmed Al-Qaysi

2. Q. When did you join the EWI

**Qyissi** - I joined the EWI in April 1971

3. Q. What was your first encounter with the freedom fighters who joined before you?

**Qayssi** - The time I joined was when younger generation were appearing in the leadership positions, and the issues of concern involved the need for reform. The younger generation had reservations and criticism against the older leadership's administrative styles. The younger generation I encountered were university students who studied in the Middle East. I myself had enrolled in a university in Damascus. Therefore, I had started contacts with those Eritreans I met there. They discussed about the Eritrean struggle, its problems, and how to reform them. Therefore, my interaction began before I joined in the field of struggle inside Eritrea. In their discussions, they raised problems within the ELF, and issues regarding the Supreme Council (SC). Their understanding was that the problems within the ELF needed to be addressed. We were all eager to go to the field and contribute directly.

4. Q. How do you explain the implosion of the ELF?

**Qayssi** - In hindsight, the situation was conflict between the leadership of the ELF. The General Command (GC) of the ELF controlled the military in the field inside Eritrea that led to conflict with the SC; because the GC became the leadership in the field of war, while the Supreme Council (SC) remained diplomatic mission. Yet, the GC started competing with the SC and found some support from countries such as Iraq. So, generally it was conflict within the ELF leadership.

5. Q. How did the tension between the SC and the GC developed till the implosion of the ELF?

**Qayssi** - I think it can be related to the developments of conflict during the Adobha congress and conflict between Osman Saleh Sabbeand the GC whereby arrests of some leadership - who originally hailed from the Red Sea region - took place. The arrests had its repercussions. All in all, it was still the result of conflict that was brewing among the leaders of the ELF. The second development was the emergence of breakaway factions who were transported from Sudan to Yemen and then to Eritrea (Dankalia). The breakaway factions later were known as Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF).

6. Q. What were the causes for conflict within the ELF leadership?

**Qayssi** - I think it had to do with the nature of the ELF. The ELF was not well structured and that there was no coordination in implementing activities. Besides, social factors had major impacts on the interactions between the fighters. For example, those who originated from the Barka region in Western lowlands of Eritrea would not go along with those who originated from the Red Sea region. There were also issues raised from those who originated from the highlands based on the marginalization they suffered from. Therefore, I would say different social backgrounds contradicted when all people gathered in the field. That situation was exacerbated by the fact that there was no clear direction from the leadership. The nature and structure of the ELF lacked national characters to embrace all Eritreans from different social backgrounds. And those who joined the struggle at early stage were mostly from the rural areas of the lowlands and brought with them their social upbringing that contradicted with different ones. But later new generation with some educational background and socialist oriented viewpoints tried to change the situation whereby the impact of social backgrounds was clearly problematic. When the younger, educated, and socialist-oriented joined the struggle, gradually things started to change from sectarian thinking to nationalist thinking.

7. Q. So, when you joined the struggle, how did you find the situation of the breakaway factions?

**Qayssi** - When I joined the struggle in early 1971, I just followed my friends who were originally from the Red Sea region. When I arrived, there were three groups. One was composed of those who originated from the Red Sea region such as the Semhar and Afar areas. The second was composed of Abu-Tayara group and some from Barka region. The third group was that of some seven to nine highlanders by the Aala side and became a base for the highlanders. When it comes to the situation as I saw it, generally I would say the differences in societal advancements among the highlands and the lowlands of Eritrea had its impacts on the struggle period. When the ELF started the EWI it started it in the lowlands, and those who joined it were mostly from the lowlands. They had their own picture of Eritrea. The highlanders also had their own picture of Eritrea. Therefore, it can be said that how the lowlanders and the highlanders pictured Eritrea might not be the same. Anyway, things started to change slowly towards nationalist thinking. Both the ELF and the breakaway factions led by younger generation strove to change the atmosphere towards nationalist thinking during the 1970s.

8. Q. What was the causes of the civil war that started aftermath the Adobha congress?

**Qayssi** - A major factor that can be seen as a cause of the civil war was that the ELF declared that the field in Eritrea could not tolerate more than one organization. Meaning: they did not want breakaway groups to flourish. Therefore, they insisted the breakaway groups either re-merged to the ELF-the-mother or liquidated.

9. Q. How did then the situation developed in the field?

**Qayssi** - I cannot say much about the ELF as I was not part of it. However, it was clear that the ELF started changing and nationalist thinking flourished because many new generations joined the organization. When it comes to the situation in PLF, there was quick developmentss mainly because many highlanders joined the Aala breakaway group. Along line the increase in number of highlanders, of course there were differences and conflicts within the Aala group. Then with the emergence of various opposition voices within the group, the leadership introduced strict discipline to control the situation. The introduction of strict discipline was based on the previous experiences the leadership underwent in the ELF. After the mid-1970s, the PLF (later EPLF) was

democratic in a sense that it was open to ideas and the introduction of Cadre School to shape the thinking of the fighters.

10. Q. Comparing the ELF and PLF, there was leadership differences, what do you say?

**Qayssi** - I think the PLF leadership had learnt from its experience in the ELF. Therefore, it tried to avoid the problems – such as sectarianism - that created chaos in the ELF. The aggressive approach used by the PLF leadership helped the upliftment of the nationalist thinking. The introduction of the strict discipline included the prohibition of talking about religions, about own areas of origin such as provinces, about ethnicity etc. If found talking about those things would lead to severe punishment. The question of why the PLF leadership took aggressive actions to silence critics is something which needs further discussions and study. Silencing critics may look a solution, but it was mere postponement of the problem; it did not solve the problems. Because the PLF leadership did not foresaw the long-term solution. The same leadership characteristics continued after independence; therefore, the people of Eritrea continue to pay the price.

11. Q. When the PLF-1 and PLF-2 merged (and that at its background the PLF-1 had strong ties to Osman Saleh Sabbe), and later in 1975-6 when Osman Saleh Sabbe separated from the PLF, most of the PLF-1 members remained. How do you explain the situation?

**Qayssi** - As I understand it, there was difference of political viewpoints. While Sabbe had strong ties with the Middle East, the PLF new leaders saw that the foreign relationship should go out of the Middle East and take global perspective. But still, there were some who followed Sabbe. It is also important not to forget that the role of the secret party that had already started playing a coordination role among both the PLF-1 and PLF-2.

12. Q - How do you explain the secret party that was formed in early 1970s?

**Qayssi** - The hidden Party I was part of was called Peoples Party, which was active till the final stages of the EWI. It was formed in Ghedem in 04 April 1971. Then I, Baduri, and Ahmed Hlal (may be Ahmed Hilal joined a little ahead of us) were new just joined the struggle in the field. It was only two weeks since we joined. The idea of hidden party

started from Damascus before we joined the struggle in the field. By then there was something known as, “there won’t be a revolution without theory” and so forth, that is how it all started. When we arrived in Ghedem in eastern Eritrea, there arrived [from the Aala group] Isaias Afwerki, wedi-fenqil, and Mesfin Hagos. It was the first time I met with Isaias Afwerki. They were invited to come to the meeting. They came because they needed weapons, because when we [the other group] arrived in Ghedem we had weapons with us. Besides, Isaias and Ramadan might have had the same idea that started from the time when they received political and military training in China. So, for us to share the weapons with the Aala group and then to strength our efforts, we needed coordination. Anyway, our Ghedem meeting took place during night. In the meeting, we selected leaders. They were Ramadan, Isaias, Ahmed Hilal, Omaru, and one more I forgot. However, the Party did not continue as it was formed in Ghedem, because as I see it now there could have been problems within the Aala group that we were not aware of. Anyway, there was plan to re-structure our forces by mixing our side and that of the Aala group. But not long, there were some complaints from the Aala group saying they had lack of weapons, the weapons that they had weapons that did not function properly, that we did not want to share with them from the weapons we had, etc. Finally, we called a meeting of the secret party members. In the meeting, Baduri – our member - raised a question saying that the issue of weapons could be solved by the leaders of both sides. But we needed to coordinate our efforts towards national thinking. To that end, the cadres of the Aala group needed to meet and talk about it, because their national viewpoint is not clear to us. Baduri’s comment made Isaias become angry and said how com Baduri said that? The meeting then did not proceed because Isaias left. It marked the end of the Party that was formed in Ghedem, at least practically. Thereafter, for about six months the two sides were not in good terms. To the extent that the separation looked as if Muslim vs Christian. Our group Muslim and the Aala side Christian. If a new Muslim joined to the Aala group, they would send him to us, and vice versa. But there was still contact between Isaias and Ramadan at personal level, and because, as my office was News dept and located somewhere nearer, Isaias used to visit me. Anyway, then the Aala group conducted its first congress and elected their leaders composed of Isaias, Tewolde Iyob, Solomon Woldemaryam, Mesfin Hagos, and Asmerom Gerezghiher. In their congress, they decided to send a delegation to Beirut to meet directly with Osman Saleh Sabbe and seek for support from him without telling us. So, we became cautious when we heard about their congress because we saw the

congress as an action to go in their own separately. Then came our congress of Embahara, In our congress, we decided to elect new leadership. In our congress we declared that we did not recognize the Beirut committee. We only recognized Sabbe and Woldeab Woldemariam. Then in separate way, our delegation, and the delegation of the Aala group met in Beirut. Our delegates were Ramadan Mohammednur and Ali Said Abdella. The Aala group delegates were Isaias Afwerki and Mesfin Hagos. In Beirut, delegates of both sides started to communicate and agree on issues regarding the foreign mission to be composed of Osman Saleh Sabbe and Woldeab Woldemariam. Meanwhile, civil war erupted in the field that started by the ELF. The war was first waged against our group. The Aala group was not attacked. Then our group called leadership meeting and I raised a point that we needed to contact the Aala group to embolden our forces and protect ourselves from the ELF as the attack targeted both groups. And both our leaders in Bairut agreed that the forces of our two groups to join forces and tackle the ELF's attacks. Therefore, the civil war created environment whereby our two sides joined their forces. Thereafter, the re-start of the secret Party was raised as a crucial plan.

13. Q - How did the coordination of the two groups (PLF-1 and PLF-2) proceeded?

**Qayssi** - In the process of joining forces to protect ourselves from the ELF attacks, we had to merge our forces and elect joint leadership whereby Isaias became the head and Ramadan became the secretary. Generally, from the side of the PLF-2 it was mostly Isaias that we could see in every leadership activity those days. From our side, Ahmed Hilal, Ramadan, Me, Baduri and others were active leaders. We are talking about joint leadership from both sides as organization. The secret Party was practically not active.

14. Q- What about the issue of Menkaa?

**Qayssi** - The issue of Menkaa was conflict solely among the highlanders. I think the problem began from the start when the Aala group conducted its first congress. The issue raised were about democratic concerns. They were not sectarian by nature in the beginning. The critics targeted Isaias for being controlling and so forth. And there was criticism against Solomon Woldemariam dubbed him as sectarian, which then took shape into some Hamssien against some from Akele-Guzzai. The issue cannot be said

it was purely sectarian based on regionalism but looked much more complicated. In such conflict, Isaias took neutral position and stood on the sideline with the PLF-1 group. Gradually, the conflict took a character of somehow conflict between leaders from Hammasien and Akele-Guzzai and leaked down to the file-and-rank. In order to calm and control the situation, both sides in conflict were dubbed as regionalist and sectarian and were made to be isolated. A third alternative force was needed to emerge; therefore, the importance of the hidden Party re-emerged.

### **List of Participants**

1. Nuru Abdulhay:  
A veteran of the Eritrean politics during the 1950s. He was one of the founding members of Asmara Branch of an Eritrean clandestine Movement called the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM). As one of the founding members of the ELM's Asmara Branch, the focus of the interview was about his personal account of the ELM Asmara Branch. Interview conducted on 07 March 2021 over a phone.
2. Mohammedberhan Belata:  
A veteran of the Eritrean war for independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1964. He held several top positions during the armed struggle and during post-independence of Eritrea. Interview conducted on 08 March 2021 over "zoom" teleconference application.
3. Mohammed Nugus Bahta:  
A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in late 1962. He served as one of three top military commanders of Zone-3 when the ELF had been divided into zonal command system. Interview was conducted face-to-face in Kassala, eastern Sudan on 25 July 2021.
4. Saleh Mohammed Saeed:  
A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1964. He served as one of three military commanders of Zone-5 when the ELF had been divided into zonal command system. He also served as top military command till the ELF was pushed out of the field by the ELPLF in 1981. Interview was conducted face-to-face in Kassala, eastern Sudan on 25 July 2021
5. Mohammed Ali Farah:  
A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1965. He served in the logistics section of the ELF. Interview was conducted face-to-face in Kassala, eastern Sudan on 26 July 2021
6. Ismael Suleiman:



A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1963. He served in different positions during the struggle. Interview conducted on 09 April 2021 over a Mobile Phone

7. Ahmed Saleh Al Qaysi:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF) in its nascent stage in early 1971. He served as a central committee member of the EPLF from its 1<sup>st</sup> congress in 1977 was elected again in the 2<sup>nd</sup> congress in 1987 till Eritrea's independence. He served as a central committee member of the secret party of the EPLF. He also held several top positions during the armed struggle and post-independence of Eritrea. Interview conducted on 09 March 2021 over "zoom" teleconference application.

8. Idris Omar Bereray:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1967. He was one of those who split from the ELF and formed the PLF. He continued in the struggle after PLF changed into EPLF. He served in different top military commander positions during the armed struggle. Interview conducted on 11 March 2021 over "zoom" teleconference application.

9. Dr Yousef Berhanu Ahmedeen:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) as a member of mass organization in Italy in 1965. He joined to the field in 1971 during the ELF's 1<sup>st</sup> congress. He served in different leadership positions in the ELF. Interview conducted on 13 March 2021 over "zoom" teleconference application.

10. Tesfay Temnewo:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF) in 1972. Interview was conducted over "zoom" on 18 August 2021

11. Mekonen Andemichael Berhane:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the PLF-2 in 1972. Interview conducted on 12 April 2021 over "zoom" teleconference application.

12. Col. Tsegu Fessahaye Bahta:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF) in 1972. Interview was conducted over Facebook Messenger on 20 August 2021

13. Col. Khaled Nurhusein Abera:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF) in 1975. Interview was conducted over Facebook Messenger on 14 August 2021

14. Yemane Tekhlegergis:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Peoples' Liberation Front (PLF) in 1975. Interview was conducted over "zoom" teleconference application on 21 August 2021

15. Abdu Suleiman Abdu:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1974. Interview was conducted over “zoom” on 13 August 2021

16. Said Mohammed Said:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1976. Interview was conducted over “zoom” teleconference application on 16 August 2021

17. Awelkhair Abdelhafeez Hussein:

A veteran of the Eritrean war of independence. He joined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in 1974. Interview was conducted over Facebook Messenger on 15 August 2021