



A Historical Survey of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP)

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Abstract

This article attempts to provide a short and brief overview of the history of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, abbreviated and commonly named EPRP. The emphasis of the paper is to understand the history of EPRP from its conception to its final disintegration. Thus, the paper investigated the foundation and advancement of EPRP and its political as well as ideological relationship with Derg and other political organizations, including the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Likewise, the collapse of its struggle and its legacies in the political culture of Ethiopia are highlighted.

Keywords: *Development, Disintegration, EPRP, Foundation, Relationship, Legacy.*

1. Introduction

Ethiopia, despite its thousands-year history as an independent state, had experienced a feudal system of government, especially under a "Solomonic" dynasty.¹ As a result, the political party system is a recent phenomenon. A political party can be defined as "an organized group of people who exercise their legal rights to identify with similar political aims and opinions and that seek to influence public policy by getting their candidates elected to public office."²

In Ethiopia, the history of the beginning of political parties is strongly linked with the history of the Ethiopian student movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1960s and 1970s, Addis Ababa University students were active in asking for various reforms, especially concerning the issue of land, and they were making demonstrations. They had been organized into groupings. In the meantime, there were Ethiopian students who were sent abroad to different countries for further studies. These students had been engaged in the same demand for administrative change, condemning the imperial regime as reactionary. Students from Addis Ababa, due to the repressive measures of the Haile Selassie regime, fled abroad, where they established their own political parties in collaboration with scholarship students who were already sent by the government, especially to Europe and the USA. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), considered pioneers in the history of the Ethiopian political party system, were the products of these student movements.³

2. Research Methods

This paper attempts to synthesize some concepts about the history of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) by consulting different secondary sources, specifically journal articles, books, and research theses. The paper focuses on the foundation and progress of the EPRP, its relations with *Derg*, with the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), and with the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), and its decline as well as its impression on the political sphere of Ethiopia.

¹Hess Robert, L., *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), P. 88.

²Solomon G/yohanis, "Political Parties, Party Programmaticity and Party System in Post 1991 Ethiopia" (*European Scientific Journal*, June 2014, Vol. 10, No. 16), P. 419.

³Gebre Tareke, *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), Pp. 162 and 166.; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1991), P. 221.

3. The Foundation and Advancement of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party

3.1 The Foundation of EPRP

Since the liberation of Ethiopia from the Italian occupation in 1941, the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie has encountered consecutive rebellions and oppositions. These oppositions were both from rural and urban society, i.e., peasants and "elites," and even from the military. Regarding rural uprisings, the old regime faced peasant rebellions from Tigray, Bale, and Gojjam as a reaction to heavy taxation and maladministration. However, all of these ended with great suppression.⁴

Another most important opposition scheme was from the Ethiopian students, which can be considered the "elites." It is clear that Ethiopia showed development in the education sector after the liberation period. The country is able to possess various secondary schools. Moreover, the establishment of higher education institutions came true following the foundation of the University College of Addis Ababa, later Addis Ababa University, in 1950.⁵ As a result, the number of Ethiopian students increased dramatically in major towns, especially in the capital. There were also many scholarships for Ethiopian students abroad sponsored by Haile Selassie's government for further study.⁶

This development in turn, as the saying goes, 'A new solution brings a new problem' gave birth to student movements in which students showed their grievances and oppositions against the reactionary rule of Emperor Haile Selassie I. Students, especially from college and university, began to form different groupings and became obsessed with making continuous demonstrations, especially after the failed 1960 coup, designed by a foreign educated Germame Neway, demanding socio-economic and administrative reforms emphasized at the issue of land, chanting "Land to the Tiller." This student movement inside Ethiopia had been backed by Ethiopian students abroad. Yet, the response of the regime was detention and beating. Having understood that it was impossible to organize and bring about change due to the repressive measures of the government, the Addis Ababa University students decided to flee abroad.⁷

To this end, on August 13, 1969, Berehanemesqel Reda, Amanuel G/yesus, Haileyesus Woldesenbet, Bineyam Adane, Eyasu Alemayehu, Gezahegn Endale, and Abdisa Ayana hijacked the Ethiopian aircraft from Bahir Dar to Sudan. From Sudan, they went to Algeria in February 1970, and there they continued their education. These students from Algeria began contact with the Ethiopian students in Europe, especially with Haile Fida's group. The Algerian group and other Ethiopian students established study cells in their respective destinations; thereby, they discussed the political and economic issues of their country and wanted to establish an organized political party. Both were anti-feudalist and anti-imperialist; however, the Algerian and the Europe student groups failed to come to an agreement with political ideology, and their dream of creating one strong political party remained in via.⁸

Finally, the Algerian (Berehanemesqel's) group founded the Ethiopian People's Liberation Organization (EPLO) in 1972, later called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), also known by its Amharic acronym, *IHAPA*, in 1975, and its counterpart in Europe (Haile Fida's) group founded the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), also known by its Amharic acronym, *ME'ISON*, in July 1968.⁹

The process of forming the Ethiopian People's Liberation Organization (EPLO), later renamed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), took over two years. Its establishment conference was held in Berlin, Germany, from April 2–9. The founding party preferred the Moist style of socialism for its political ideology. Removing the imperial government and establishing a democratic and developed socialist state of the people's government were underlined as its political lines.¹⁰ Until 1974, there were four EPLO group committees in Ethiopia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Most of the members of these groups were students who were

⁴ Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia...* Pp. 215-218.

⁵ Edmond J., Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to Peoples Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), P. 82.

⁶ Bahiru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia...*, Pp. 220-223.

⁷ Bahru Zewude, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960-1974* (Addis Ababa University: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014), P. 109.

⁸ Taklo Teshome, *Yedem Zemen: Yechenegefe Ra'ey-Yaltequache Tarik, (The Bloody Years: the Aborted Vision-the Unfinished History, Part 2)* (Addis Ababa, 2008 EC), Pp. 22-23.

⁹ *Ibid.*; and Ayenew Fenta, "The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP) Formation, Structure and Program", *World Research of Political Science Journal*, Vol.4, No. 2, 1-10, 2021, P.5.

¹⁰ Taklo Teshome, *YeDem Zemen: Ewunetegna Tarik, (The Bloody Years: True History, part, 1)* (Mielborne: Far East Trading, 2008 EC), P. 35.; Kiflu Tadese, *Ya Tiwulid: Ye Itopia Hizb Abiyotawi Parti ke Mejemeraw eski 1975 (The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, Vol. I)*, (New Jersey: Red Sea Press INC, 1993), P. 85.

active in the Ethiopian student movement, and their societal composition was from lower to middle class, set up from different ethnic groups in Ethiopia.¹¹

3.2 The Advancement of EPRP

Although its foundation dates back to 1972, EPRP did not have clearly identified members inside Ethiopia until 1974. In 1974, some of its founding members, like Samuel Alemayehu, Tesfaye Debesay, Zeru Kihshin, and Kiflu Tadesse, were sent to Addis Ababa, where they planted the EPLO's movement in Ethiopia in general and in the capital in particular. In June of the same year, they counseled on how to get the support of the Ethiopian youth and organize it.¹²

In a limited period, EPLO rallied a huge number of members from different classes of society in the capital. In the meantime, there were different leftist groups in Addis Ababa, especially among the Ethiopian students. The EPLO leaders who entered from abroad hurried up to get the support of these groups and were able to achieve their goals effectively. The most significant student groups that merged with EPLO were the student groups led by Getachew Maru and Yohannis Birhane independently.¹³

The EPLO also hastened its progress by ventilating its program and writings through different publication organs. Some of those organs were *Democracia*, *the Voice of the Workers*, *Abiyot*, *Tenes* or *Wake Up*, etc. Having strengthened itself inside the country in such ways, the EPLO divided Ethiopia into five interzones, classified as Addis Ababa, Begemidir/Gojjam, Tigray/Wollo, Harar, Sidamo, and the South Region.¹⁴

Besides peaceful means, the EPRP, from its ground of establishment, agreed to form its own army wing so as to launch an extended guerrilla struggle based from the countryside to urban areas. To this end, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which was based in Syria, caught its attention to get guerrilla-fighting training. Thus, having taken a diplomatic approach with the DFLP, the volunteer members of the EPLO, numbered about fourteen, were elected and trained in rural and urban guerrilla fighting in Syria for six months. This marked the creation of the military unit of the EPLO, later EPRP. This military wing comes to be known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army (EPRA). This unit of the army was composed of Amhara, Tigre, Oromo, and Gurage ethnic groups so as to make it a multi-national army, as Ye'eyobzer Zewdu stated.¹⁵

However, the EPLO stayed clandestine until it surfaced in August 1975. On August 29, the former EPLO renamed itself the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and officially announced itself as a vanguard party of Ethiopia using the languages of Amharic, Oromiffa, Tigre, and English via its organ, *Democracia*, throughout the country. This asserted its initial strength, and *Democracia* got official recognition as its organ. Following its official inauguration, the EPRP leaders totally entered Addis Ababa from outside. On behalf of *Democracia* as well as study cells, EPRP members in the capital grew to a great number at a speedy rate.¹⁶

On the other hand, the military wing (EPRA) had already been sent to the northern part of Ethiopia as soon as its military training in Syria was completed. It was the Tigray region, particularly Assimba Mountain, that was selected as a military base where the EPRA would flare up its guerrilla struggle. However, the army unit, which was under the leadership of Berhanamesqel Reda, did not reach Assimba at the supposed time because of the blockade on its way by the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) when it reached Eritrea. The EPLF did that intentionally in order to get recognition for the independent state of Eritrea from the EPRP. In the meantime, EPRP was under large-scale development in Addis Ababa. Hearing this, later on, the EPLF feared that any disagreement with the EPRP may cause a

¹¹Kiflu Tadesse, *Ya Tiwuld: Ye Ihapa Tarik (The Generation: The History of EPRP, Vol. III)* (Addis Ababa, 2007 EC), P. 24.

¹²Ye'eyobzer Zewde, *Yeteramajochu Mecherasha: Yelewut Enkiskasie Bezemenawit Itopia 1930s-1970s: Enačchenfalen (The Last of the Progressives: The Movement of Change in the Modern Ethiopia 1930s-1970 EC: We Will Win)* (Addis Ababa: Empress printing Press, 2010 EC), P. 144.

¹³Tesfu Kefyalaw, "The Organizational Structure of the EPRP (C. 1972-1978) and its Defeat" (A Thesis Presented to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Art in History, 2009), P. 37.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Pp. 37 and 66.

¹⁵Ye'eyobzer, P. 144.

¹⁶John Young, *Peasant Revolutions in Ethiopia: the Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), P. 130.

blow to its future fate. Therefore, it allowed the EPRA unit to pass into Assimba, and the army unit reached Assimba in April 1975.¹⁷

The leaders and central committees of the party in the capital, however, discontinued their relations with the EPRA that was sent to Tigray. Above all, following the unexpected increase in its members and supporters in Addis Ababa, they looked the *Derg* down and decided to overthrow it through urban guerrilla struggle. To make this effective, in 1975, the EPRP leaders set up an urban military wing in Addis Ababa.¹⁸

4. EPRP and *Derg*

At its very beginning, EPRP emerged to overthrow the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie I. However, out of its contribution, the imperial regime was deposed from power by the 1974 crowd-pleasing revolution, and, in place of that, the military regime/*Derg* put on the throne. This incident was a surprise for the newly established diaspora party (EPRP), which was ready to come into Ethiopia so as to plant its plan of struggle. Nevertheless, in July 1974, the EPRP political leaders and, in 1975, its army wing, entered Ethiopia, i.e., Addis Ababa and Tigray, respectively.¹⁹

Following the deposition of the Haile Selassie regime, *Derg* assumed full state control and announced the establishment of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC). To the contrary of the demand of the Ethiopian masses, the military government, with its popular slogan "Ethiopia First," however, emerged as more severe than the Haile Selassie government. The Ethiopian people were seeking the establishment of a provisional government. Yet *Derg* banned all forms of opposition and warned every citizen of the country not to be organized and undertake any sort of resentment. Soon after coming into power, the military regime encountered several opposition movements grouped into the Left and Right oppositions, characterized by urban and rural-based, respectively. Among the leftists, it was the EPRP that emerged as the most important opposing party.²⁰

By advocating the need to establish a provisional people's government, EPRP was able to gain huge numbers of followers in Addis Ababa within a short period of time. It had been criticizing as well as accusing the *Derg* of its dictatorship. Explicitly, in November 1975, EPRP advocated the establishment of a provisional people's government in place of *Derg*. On April 21, 1976, the Mengistu government of *Derg* established a new agency called the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA) aimed at the dissemination of Marxism-Leninism and a weekly discussion meeting lasting two hours in all governmental and non-governmental organizations in the country. This was expected as it would settle the worsening relationship between EPRP and *Derg*. But it was futile.²¹

Rather than coming up with a compromise, EPRP sought to organize the opposition on a mass basis and lead it in a coordinated and direct assault against the *Derg*. Until mid-1976, it was focused on organizational and propaganda work with coercive criticism as well as preparation for forceful confrontation. It had been infiltrating into different associations of the military government, including the military unit. As stated earlier, the political leaders of the party underestimated the power of the *Derg* and planned to remove it from power through urban guerrilla struggle. To this end, with hasty decisions, EPRP leaders set up an urban military wing in Addis Ababa, which later claimed huge lives of sacrifice. By the summer of 1976, it looked poised to overthrow the *Derg* from power.²²

Reorganized clandestinely, EPRP's threat now moved towards a direct confrontation with Mengistu's government. This violent form of struggle became vivid following the call of the EPRP not to celebrate the second year anniversary of the Imperial regime's demise in September 1976. Towards the end of the same month, it also instigated a mass of labor strikes. Simultaneously, a series of raids and disturbances were intensified, intended to wage urban guerrilla warfare. The radical intellectual contingents of the POMOA and other collaborators of the *Derg* were put at the forefront of the attack. In November, EPRP began to hunt down and kill urban association officials and ministers. In the meantime, for the first time, *Derg* officially declared in its official news paper, *Addis Zemen*, EPRP as an anarchist organization rather than a vanguard part of workers, for the destruction of properties and the instigation of workers for strikes as well as

¹⁷Tesfaye Mekonnen, *Yidres Le bale Tariku (To whom Concerned the History)* (Addis Ababa: Empress Printing press, 2010 EC), P. 157.

¹⁸Tesfu, P. 78.; Taklo Teshome, 2008 EC, P. 61.

¹⁹Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), P. 139.

²⁰Temesgen Gebeyehu, "Rural Unrest, and Resistance in Ethiopia: The Experience of Wello and Shewa Provinces. A Comparative Analysis", (*Global Advanced Research Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June, 2012), P. 1.

²¹Andargachew, Pp. 147 and 162.

²²John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Nottingham: Russell Ltd, 1986), P. 155.

assassination. In sum, by the autumn of 1976, the most serious offensive attack was launched by the EPRP against Mengistu's rule, especially in the urban sector.²³

In response to the actions of EPRP, Mengistu Hailemariam advocated arming the broad masses and declared a revolutionary action, also commonly known as the "Red Terror," which could be expressed as a savage and indiscriminate measure, as a counterattack to what he called the "White Terror" of EPRP.²⁴ By February, Mengistu announced that the revolution had swiftly changed from defensive to offensive status. As a result, according to Andargachew Tiruneh

...the revolution defense squads and the urban dweller's defense squads which were formerly charged with the task of carrying out the duties of the police force, now launched directly against the EPRP from the start. In the aftermath of Mengistu's coup these squads were one of the sections of the broad masses that were armed to carry out the 'Red Terror' against the 'White Terror' of the EPRP.²⁵

The *Derg* armed squads, which were licensed to take any sort of revolutionary action against the suspected EPRP members and sympathizers, conducted a house-to-house search, also termed "Asesa," in the last decade of March and the first decade of May 1977. On the other side, EPRP through its sharpshooters, actively engaged in the killing of leaders of different unions and associations, including the students. Consequently, the loss of lives horrifyingly increased. At the time, EPRP and the POMOA members were butchering each other not only in the capital but also in provincial towns. Mengistu's government again declared a second round of "Red Terror" in November 1977²⁶ thereby EPRP's backbone got broken and marked its final blow of urban struggle both in Addis Ababa and provincial towns. Finally, in March 1978, the military government professed that EPRP had been wiped out completely. The escapees of EPRP from the brutal execution now left for rural areas in Gondar and Tigray, where they met with EPRA and continued their struggle until their final debacle in 1980.²⁷

5. EPRP and All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM)

Both EPRP and AESM were the immediate results of the Ethiopian Student Movement. They were founded outside Ethiopia in 1972 and 1968, respectively. From their background, as members of the Ethiopian Student Movement, their aim was to struggle against the imperial government. Yet, the imperial regime was overthrown in 1974 without the participation of these parties. Later on, they began to advocate to condemn the *Derg* as a dictatorship, demand the immediate replacement of the *Derg* by a People's Government, and instruct the literate population about Marxism-Leninism using their organs of *Democracia* (EPRP) and the Voice of the Masses (AESM).²⁸

Both of them professed Marxism-Leninism as the correct ideology for their political line.²⁹ After the 1974 revolution, these leftists returned to Ethiopia from abroad and dominated the political scene of the country. On behalf of the POMOA, both EPRP and AESM tried a little bit so as to work together, although it soon changed to dread. Their positions on these and other issues continued to be almost identical until at least the summer of 1975.³⁰ A part of the above-stated communalities, EPRP and AESM, have experienced differences starting from oral altercations to hunting one another. Their disagreement traces back to 1970, when the Ethiopian students abroad diverged into the Federation and Europists concerning the Ethiopian students.³¹

Disagreements also surfaced around AESM's proposal to obtain military instruction in China. Their final collapse had been preceded by these disagreements. The official split between EPRP and AESM was announced on April 13,

²³*Ibid.*, P.162.

²⁴Stefano, Bellucci, "The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution at 40: Social, Economic, and Political Legacies" (*Northeast African Studies, Vol. 16, No. 1*, pp. 1-14: Michigan State University Press, 2016), P.9.

²⁵Andargachew, P. 209.

²⁶Wiebel, Jacob, "Let the Red Terror intensify: political violence, governance and society in urban Ethiopia, 1976-78", (*International journal of African historical studies.*, 48 (1), pp. 13-30, 2015), Pp. 15 and 20.

²⁷*Ibid.*, Pp. 214-215.

²⁸Andargachew, P. 140.

²⁹Gebru Tareke, "The Red Terror in Ethiopia: A Historical Abberation", (*Journal of Developing Societies, Vol. 24, No.2*, SAGE Publications, 2018), P.191.

³⁰*Ibid.*, P.139.

³¹Bahru Zewde, *Documenting the Ethiopian Student Movement: An Exercise in Oral History* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Science Studies, 2010), P, 16.

1971. Bahru Zewde (2014) asserts that the primary distinction stemmed from how the revolution was perceived to be approaching and the steps that needed to be taken to get ready for it.³²

Moreover, their differences became worse with their return to Ethiopia. As of November 1975, AESM publicly notified EPRP of its differences with the EPRP because of EPRP's condemnation of *Derg* as fascist. Yet, AESM considered *Derg*, as it could have come down on the side of the people. Therefore, AESM stood as a collaborator of the *Derg*, advocating a principle termed "critical support."³³ However, in actual fact, their divergent views probably showed political positioning rather than ideological convictions.³⁴ EPRP and AESM boast each other as vanguard parties of the Ethiopian people. They engaged in insulting one another through their respective organs. AESM pooh-pooh EPRP's call for an elected Provisional People's Government accuses it of de-politicization, disorganization, and disarming the masses in order to get power through shortcuts. Their altercation now transformed into assassination in April 1976. Their tension escalated in October when Fikre Merid, a member of the Central Committee of AESM, was assassinated by the EPRP. And their confrontation continued till AESM too became the victim of the "Red Terror" in November 1977.³⁵

6. EPRP and the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF)

Similar to other fronts and organizations born from the Ethiopian Student Movements, the Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF) also traced its origins there. According to Michael Woldemariam, TPLF's emergence was augured by the activities of two overlapping Tigrean student movements formed as the Tigrean United Student Association (TUSA) and the Tigrean Nationalist Organization (TNO) at Addis Ababa University. At the end, these two organizations merged as TPLF. Its aim was to liberate Tigray from "Amhara-dominated oppression" and to establish an independent state of Tigray. Then, they went to Tigray and began an armed struggle based at Dedebeit, western Tigray.³⁶ Yet, unless they were intoxicated with narrow mindedness, there was no an Amhara domination as well as special oppression over the Tigreans.

Although both of them were confronting their common enemy, *Derg*, they had never come to an agreement. In fact, they had a series of meetings between 1975 and 1978 in which they discussed forming unity or at least avoiding future clashes between them. For instance, they held a meeting in Agame *Awrajja*, Tigray, at the end of October 1976. Although both of them were confronting their common enemy, *Derg*, they had never come to an agreement. In fact, they had a series of meetings between 1975 and 1978 in which they discussed forming unity or at least avoiding future clashes between them. For instance, they held a meeting in Agame *Awrajja*, Tigray, at the end of October 1976.³⁷

But all those attempts were fruitless. From the very beginning, EPRP was struggling for the whole Ethiopian people, but TPLF was for the Tigray people solely. Finally, the EPRA and TPLF, which were based at Assimba and Dedit, respectively, came into direct confrontations and fought different battles. According to Asmamaw Hailu, the first fighting was conducted on February 28, 1978, in the Agame *Awrajja*. The second conflict that caused huge losses to the EPRA was fought on March 13, 1978, at the battle of Nebelet, and the third was at the battle of Bezet, Tigray. Of all these battles, at Bezet, huge lives were lost from both sides. At the end of 1978, comparable with its defeat and expulsion from urban centers by the "Red Terror," the EPRP was defeated by the TPLF and left Tigray for Gondar.³⁸

7. Disintegration of EPRP and its Political Outcome

7.1 Demise of EPRP's Struggle

Initially, EPRP was established to overthrow the old regime and replace it with the People's Democratic Government. However, Haile Sellasie's government was demolished prior to its interference, and then EPRP resumed its struggle

³²Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960-1974* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014), P. 225; and Andargachew, P. 139.

³³Gebre Tareke, "The Red Terror...", Pp. 191-192; and Wudu Tafete, "Maison: From Opposition to Critical Support, 1974-1977" (*Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol., P., 47-74, 2011), pp. 58-59.

³⁴Andargachew, P. 147.

³⁵Ian Scott Horst, *Like Hochu Minh! Like Che Guera!: The Revolutionary Left in Ethiopia, 1969-1979* (Paris: Foreign Language Press, 2020), P.262; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1955-1999*, P. 247; and Andargachechew, P. 149.

³⁶Michael Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa: Rebellion and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Pp. 187-188.

³⁷Asmamaw Hailu, *IHASE: Ye Itopia Hizb Abiyotawi Serawit Ke 1964-1970 EC (EPRA: The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party 1964-1970 EC, part I)* (Addis Ababa, 2003 EC), Pp. 241-243.

³⁸*Ibid.*; and Aregawi Berhe, *A Political History of Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975-1991): Revolt, Ideology, and Mobilization in Ethiopia* (Amsterdam: Vrije University Press, 2008), P.350.

against the new government of *Derg*. The newly empowered military government soon emerged as unpopular. To this end, EPRP posed guerrilla warfare, though its struggle ended in failure.³⁹

EPRP had attained its zenith of popularity in 1976; thus, it appeared mighty and invincible. Based on this development, EPRP made one of its most fatal and fateful decisions. EPRP underestimated the power of the *Derg* and decided to oust it from power through an urban guerrilla attack. This decision, however, claimed the lives of huge EPRP's members from higher to lower ranks. The response of the *Derg* against EPRP's action was harsh and ferocious. The military government, which was armed to its nose, began to annihilate the bare-handed EPRP members through the "Red Terror" campaign. In this case, the hastily and emotionally waged urban struggle of EPRP ended in early 1978.⁴⁰

The survivors of the slaughtering retreated into the rural areas of Gondar and Tigray, where they joined the EPRA (the rank-and-file) unit, which had been there as of early 1975. In the same instance, as indicated earlier, the EPRA was expelled from Tigray by the TPLF and is now restricted to the northern part of Gondar. In this area, EPRP stayed for about five years, waging its rural-based struggle against *Derg* on one side and TPLF on the other. Its struggle had been divided into four regions: Region One (based in Telemt), Region Two (based in Armachiho), Region Three (based in Belesa), and Region Four (based in Wolkait).⁴¹ The rank-and-file had been asking the political leaders of the party to call a meeting for a general discussion. But the leaders were reluctant to do so. Because of this, the rank-and-file members accused the leaders of becoming dictators. Then they rebelled and divided into pro-EPRP and anti-EPRP groups. In addition to the problem of the EPRP leaders, the military government declared a military strategy against EPRP/EPRA, also referred to as "*Kebo Matikat*" or "Attack through incircle," in the summer of 1979. Again, TPLF had also been threatening EPRP/EPRA from the northern direction. The EPRA suffered a devastating defeat by the TPLF, especially at the battle of Qalema, Wolkait, on March 7, 1980, while it was on its way from Eritrea, armed with modern firearms by the Eritrean Liberation Front, to Telemt. In the meantime, EPRA was also accompanied by one battalion of *the Jebha/ELF*.⁴²

The rank-and-file of EPRP felt denied by their political leaders on the one hand and fell into a precarious condition sandwiched between *Derg* from the southern direction and TPLF from the northern side on the other hand. Finally, on June 15, 1980, the *Tarnasha* Conference, Telemt, was held. At this conference, a strong debate was generally conducted on the question, "Could the armed struggle proceed or not?" The participants highly criticized the EPRP as a dictatorship and went back to forgetting its initial aim.⁴³ Accordingly, they insisted on discarding the armed struggle. At the end, they chose one of the following four alternatives:

- Reorganize the party as well as the army and continue the armed struggle
- Capitulate to the *Derg* and ask apologize
- Go to the Tigray region and start new-armed struggle
- Go to Sudan and left the country for abroad.⁴⁴

By and large, due to the misleading of the political leaders, the arm and army superiority of the *Derg*, and the threat from the TPLF, the struggle of the EPRP concluded in failure in the early 1980s.

7.2 EPRP's Legacy on Ethiopia's politics

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party had positive and negative impressions in the political sphere of Ethiopia. To begin with its positive legacy, EPRP torched the culture of establishing a political party system to struggle against oppressive regimes. It transformed the old culture of Ethiopia's tradition of disorganized and protracted forms of opposition against oppressive governments into a united as well as politically programmed manner of struggle.⁴⁵

³⁹Tesfaye Reste, *Miskrnet ke Bale Sltanatu Andebet (Testimony from the Authorities)* (Addis Ababa: Mankusa Printing Press, 2007 EC), P. 116; Kiflu Tadesse, *Ya Tiwulid: Ye Itopia Hizb Abiyotawi Parti ke Mejemeraw eski 1975 (The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, Vol. I)*, P. 14.; and Tesfu, Pp. 23-25.

⁴⁰Andargachew, P. 214.

⁴¹Asmamaw Halu, *IHASE, (Ye Itopia Hizbawi Abiyotawi Serawit: Ke Meskerem 1970 EC - Sene 1972 EC) (EPRA: The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army from September 1978 to June 1980, Part 2)* (Addis Ababa: Far East Trading, 2006 EC), Pp. 21-30.

⁴²Aregawi, P. 257.

⁴³Sendeke Awota, "*The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army Armed Resistance in Telemt, 1976-1980*", (MA Thesis in History, Bahir Dar University, 2018), P. 75.

⁴⁴Akale Asaye, *Yaltenberekekut: Ye IHDEN/BADEN Ye Tegel Ena Yedel Guzo, Quirr 2 (The Undeafated: the EPDN/ANDM Struggle and Victory's Journey)* (Addis Ababa: AG. TA. Private Ltd, 2006 EC), P. 488.

⁴⁵Ian Scott, P. 253.

Apart from its encouraging impressions, however, EPRP had deleterious effects on the political scene in Ethiopia. Although it had declared itself a vanguard Ethiopian political party, it lacked consistency to achieve its goal. Initially, its plan was to bring a democratic people's government to replace the then-regime through the priority of non-violent struggle, but this would be carried out through rural-based guerrilla struggle if necessary. Yet, it neglected this and attempted to control power through urban warfare. This caused a massive loss of EPRP's armed and civil members. Thrown away its political and organizational effort, EPRP came under attack and counterattack with *Derg*. In one way or another, thus, EPRP had left a black mark on Ethiopia's political history; hence, it was an actor of the bloodiest time, also termed "Red Terror and White Terror."⁴⁶ This reign of terror had a lasting effect on the generation of Ethiopia, making them hesitate to participate in political activities. They developed a phobia concerning politics because of the immense human and material loss and the migration of the elites and youths of the time.⁴⁷

8. Conclusion

The history of political parties in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon dating back about half a century. Besides its infancy, its historiography has not yet been written objectively. It was rather swayed by its sympathizers and adherents, which exposed it to bias. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party was one of those parties that lacked scholarly attention. When the history of political parties deals with Ethiopia, this party always comes to mind; hence, it was the pioneer party of the country.

EPRP emerged in 1972, following the birth of the Ethiopian Student Movements in the 1960s and 1970s. It was established abroad in Germany with the aim of deposing the Imperial regime and, in place of that, establishing a democratic government. It had an army wing known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Army (EPRA). EPRP entered Ethiopia a year after the overthrow of the Haile Selassie regime. Thus, its struggle had been with the military government, *Derg*. There had been a furious struggle between *Derg* and EPRP, resulting in the immense human lives of Ethiopians being lost. This was mainly due to the EPRP's fatal mistake of waging urban guerrilla warfare, which shifted from its initial plan of rural-based struggle.

EPRP also engaged in conflict and war with its counterparts, the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement and the Tigray People Liberation Front, because of ideological and tactical differences. Finally, EPRP failed to achieve its aim, and around the early 1980s, its struggle ceased. This was because of its internal disagreement between the political leaders and the rank-and-file and the repressive attack of the *Derg* from the urban side on the one hand and the TPLF from rural bases on the other.

Even though its existence was short-lived, EPRP had encouraging and undesirable impressions on Ethiopia's politics. Positively, it opened a new chapter of forming political parties in order to struggle with unpopular governments. The loss of many Ethiopian lives was its adverse legacy because of its inconsistent policy of struggle. In theory, its decree emphasized establishing a democratic people's government. Yet, in practice, it preferred to use force at the expense of the principles of political parties of implementing an interest through election.

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⁴⁶*Ibid.*

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