
THE ERITREAN LIBERATION STRUGGLE AND THE EPLF IDEOLOGICAL ROADMAP (1977-1991)

The making of the Eritrean domestic and foreign policy

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master's in History

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A Political Map of Eritrea shows the country and surrounding countries with international borders, the national capital, Asmara, administrative capitals, major cities, main roads, railroads, and airports.¹

¹ <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworldmap/Eritrea-political-map.htm>

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Sammendrag

Den eritreiske uavhengighetskampen i perioden 1961 til 1991 var kjennetegnet av en kompleks ideologisk utvikling. Det eritreiske folkets krav om selvbestemmelse, forankret i Wuchale-traktaten (1889) mellom det italienske riket og keiser Menelik av Etiopia, kom i konflikt med Etiopias fornyede påstander om eierskap over Eritrea. Denne konflikten ble ytterligere forsterket grunnet Rødehavets strategiske betydning under den kalde krigen, og gjenspeilet lignende utfordringer som andre afrikanske nasjoner hadde møtt under den europeiske koloniseringen på 1800-tallet. I 1952 valgte USA åpenlyst å støtte en eritreisk føderasjon med Etiopia, som resulterte i motstand fra det eritreiske folket, samt et væpnet opprør initiert av Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) i 1961.

ELF møtte en rekke utfordringer i sine formative år, blant annet religiøse, etniske og regionale splittelser, men med fremveksten av Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) i 1970 kom det et markant skifte i frigjøringsbevegelsens ideologiske kurs. Ved å omfavne marxistisk-leninistisk og maoistisk ideologi, iblandet idéer om nasjonalistisk frigjøringskamp, ble EPLF en forkjemper for sosial rettferdighet, klassekamp og etableringen av et klasseløst samfunn. Dette ideologiske rammeverket kom til å forme organisasjonens politiske agenda og tilnærming til samfunnsendring. EPLF inkorporerte med andre ord både nasjonalistiske og pragmatiske elementer i sin ideologi, og forpliktet seg samtidig på å fremme folkets interesser i en tid der Afrikas horn var preget av den kalde krigens geopolitiske realiteter.

Isaias Afwerki var en pådriver i EPLFs ideologiske utvikling, og hans strategiske ledelse formet på mange måter det politiske landskapet i de siste 14 årene av den eritreiske frigjøringskampen. Denne masteroppgaven inneholder en grundig analyse av EPLFs unike ideologiske syntese, og utforsker i tillegg ideologiens innflytelse på Eritreas kampstrategier og diplomatiske engasjementer. Ideologiens utvikling og praktiske anvendelse belyses gjennom historiske, tekstlige, kvalitative og komparative analyser av arkivmateriale fra Research and Documentation Center (RDC) i Asmara, og oppgavens konklusjon er at EPLFs ideologi i betydelig grad har formet Eritreas statsdannelse i perioden 1977 til 1991.

Denne masteroppgaven utgjør et betydelig bidrag til studiet av ideologi, og fremhever ideologiens dobbelte rolle som både en katalysator og en hindring for individuell og organisatorisk utvikling. Oppgaven beriker vår forståelse av det intrikate samspillet mellom ideologi og individers og samfunns mål i lignende frigjøringskamper og

nasjonsbyggingsprosesser, men understreker også viktigheten av ytterligere forskning på hvordan ulike ideologiske rammeverk påvirker sosiale kontekster.

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Glossary

Awet Ni Hafash = Victory to the Masses

Alpha and Omega = The beginning and endings

Awraja = Administrative division/area from 1952-1991

Afar Sultan = Ruler of the Afar tribe

Art Deco = Decorative arts and architecture

Bahri Negasi = Feudal ruler who ruled the highlands of Eritrea before the 19th century

Dimtsi Hafash Eritrea = Voice of the Broad Masses of Eritrea

Fedayeen = Self-Sacrifices commonly in secret military operations.

Halewa-Sewra = Shield of the Revolution/guards of the revolution

Hareka (Mahber Shewate) = Clandestine cells (Association of Seven Men)

Hafash Yinkah Yiwedeb Yiteatek = Masses must first Enlighten, organise, and armed

Jemahir = A name given to individuals in charge of public administration and mass organisations during the struggle for independence

Jebha = Popular name of the ELF

Kagnew Station = A United States Army installation in Asmara, Eritrea

Kifli Hizbi = Public Affairs

Kiyad El Ama = Name given to ELF following the Adobha meeting of 1969

Marina = Means Marines in Italian

Midri Bahri = Former name for Eritrea (means land of the Sea)

Naib = Deputy' or 'Representative of an Authority (in Arabic)

Nekefeta = Criticism

Nebse-Nekefeta = Self-criticism

Nikhat = consciousness/Enlightenment

Nihnan Ilamanan = Our struggle and its goals

Padre = Father, and a Christian clergyman (Priest) in Italian language

Sarian = Traditional cloth for men in the Horn of Africa

Sewra = Revolution and the armed insurgency for independence

Shaebia = Popular name of the EPLF and PFDJ

Tegadelti = Popular name given to Eritrean freedom fighters

Wahyo = Cell (a revolutionary name given to newly enlightened and organised members)

Wenbedie = Popular name by the Ethiopians for Eritrean freedom fighter

Wedi AFE/AFOM = Popular name given to President Issayas Afewerki

Zemene-Kiflitat = Years of division within the ELF from 1965-1969

Zelalemawi Zikri Ni Sematatna = Gloray to Our Martyrs

Acronyms

AD	Anno Domini (refer to the years after the birth of Jesus)
AU	African Union
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Force
EU	European Union
PFDJ	People's Front for Democracy and Justice
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
OLA	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
PLF1	People's Liberation Forces First Division
PLF2	People's Liberation Forces Second Division
PLF3	People's Liberation Forces Third Division
PLF4	People's Liberation Forces Fourth Division
PLF5	People's Liberation Forces Fifth Division
RDC	Research and Documentation Centre
SPLA	Sudan's people's liberation army
TPLF	Tigray people's liberation front
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Chapter – 1

Introduction

1.1 Stating the Problem

Eritrea's history is a chronicle of the fabric of colonialism, liberation struggles, and the persistent chasing of self-determination. It is an analysis of a nation's trajectory from colonial yoke to sovereignty, marked by the politics and strategies of nine ethnic groups who were entangled with the reformative Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) leadership.² The period from 1977 to 1991 was a critical turning point in Eritrean history. The EPLF, through its ideological roadmap, bent the path to statehood and formed Eritrea's domestic and foreign policy outlines.

Eritrea's colonial legacy, deeply influenced by an Italian presence, a British administration, and an Ethiopian annexation, provides the backdrop against which the Eritrean struggle for independence unfolded.³ This history endowed Eritrea with a unique socio-political landscape characterised by diverse ethnic groups, religious communities, and a historical memory of foreign rule. To understand the complexities of Eritrea's path to statehood, one must first immerse oneself in the historical intricacies of colonialism, decolonisation, and the Ethiopian annexation of Eritrean.

The emergence of Eritrean liberation movements, including Hareka, ELF and EPLF, in response to Ethiopian rule marked a defining phase in the nation's history.⁴ These movements, each with unique ideologies, strategies, and external influences, shaped the struggle for independence. The competition, cooperation, and conflicts among them played a pivotal role in determining the trajectory of Eritrea's quest for self-determination.

At the heart of the EPLF's journey lay its distinctive ideological roadmap, a blend of Marxism-Leninism, anti-imperialism, secularism, and Eritrean nationalism.⁵ These ideologies were not merely theoretical constructs but guiding principles that drove the EPLF's actions. This study's central focus is how these ideologies evolved, adapted, and were implemented in practice. Additionally, this analysis focuses on the influence of these ideologies on the formation of Eritrea's policies and diplomatic ties with the outside world.

² Pool, 2001, pp. xiv-xvi

³ Ibid, 2001, p. 36

⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. xxxv-xxxvii

⁵ Tesfagiorgis, 2015, pp. 8-13

The EPLF's diplomatic strategies, alliances, and international engagement during its struggle for independence were instrumental in paving the path to Eritrean statehood. Understanding the EPLF's foreign policy objectives and strategies and their impact on Eritrean independence sheds light on the complexities of international diplomacy and the role of various external actors in shaping nations' destinies.

This study extends beyond historical analysis to extract insights for emerging states facing self-determination challenges. It contributes to liberation movement theory, exploring the complexities of ideological adaptation and practical application. Moreover, it digs into the implications of EPLF's experience for contemporary international relations, offering lessons from the past that resonate in the present.

As we embark on this journey through the annals of Eritrean history, we attempt to investigate the complicated aspect of a nation's struggle, the guiding principles of the liberation movement, and the enduring implications for a broader context. The EPLF's ideological roadmap from 1977 to 1991 serves as a compass, guiding us through the maze of Eritrea's domestic and foreign policy formation.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study investigates a critical era in Eritrea's history, where the Eritrean Liberation Struggle and the emergence of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) took centre stage. Understanding this historical evolution is vital to comprehending contemporary Eritrea and its regional dynamics. This research enriches the broader scholarship on liberation movements by examining the formation and influence of the EPLF's ideological roadmap. It sheds light on how ideology informs their objectives and strategies, with implications for similar movements worldwide.

The study offers unique insights into how ideology shapes domestic and foreign policy decisions. This understanding has practical applications for policymakers working in post-independence contexts. Eritrea's foreign policy choices during this period significantly impacted the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa and beyond. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of regional and global politics. The research elucidates the historical foundations of Eritrea's contemporary internal and international policies. It offers valuable lessons on how the past influences the nation's governance. It advances academic knowledge of Eritrean history, liberation movements, and policy formation. It also opens avenues for further research in these areas.

1.3 Sources and Methodology

Regarding the methodological approach, three approaches are used to analyse and explain the making of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front's ideological roadmap and diplomatic policies: Historical Research and Textual Analysis, Qualitative Research and Comparative Analysis. Historical research methodology is the foundation of this research as it explores Eritrea's history and the EPLF's organisational and political evolution. This study relies on existing historical documents and textual analysis to reconstruct events, policies, and ideological evolution. This process includes analysing primary sources such as official documents, speeches, transcribed interviews, newspapers, and archives from the period associated with the Eritrean liberation struggle and the question of independence, focusing mainly on the period studied (1977-1991) and related issues.

Textual analysis involves gathering information about texts to gain insight into their role in society or communities.⁶ Researchers can explore and examine texts in various ways.

However, as part of the textual analysis method, I will employ qualitative content analysis as it focuses on the construction of meaning and is guided in large part by the ontological view that texts play a vital role in the social construction of reality; this is a method that is strictly utilised by scholars who are grounded in methodological positions that focus on social construction. Qualitative content analysis is a method researchers use to uncover meanings embedded within a text; the focus of such research is often latent or underlying meanings.⁷

Proceeding with the qualitative research approach, this methodology is essential for understanding the ideological and strategic considerations that influenced the EPLF's organisational structure and diplomatic strategies. This process involves collecting previously done interviews with former EPLF members, leaders, and experts in Eritrea's history to gather in-depth insights into their ideological beliefs, decision-making processes, and diplomatic strategies during the specified period studied. The qualitative data analysis technique is an alternative to the more common quantitative content analysis method, which focuses on frequencies of themes or terms found in a sample of texts.⁸

Quantitative content analysis aims to uncover manifest meanings within a text. Manifest meanings are concrete terms defined and established at the onset of research or themes

⁶ Atkinson, 2017, p. 84

⁷ Ibid. 2017, p.84

⁸ Ibid, 2017, p. 48

composed of such concrete terms. Essentially, the researcher looks for specific terms or themes within a text, counts the instances in which those terms or themes emerge, and utilises statistical analysis to discover if the recurring use of terms or themes is significant.⁹ In contrast, qualitative content analysis aims to uncover any underlying meanings in a text that cannot be seen by counting themes or terms. As in quantitative content analysis, more than merely counting a theme or term is required to understand any latent patterns developed within texts.¹⁰

Qualitative content analysis is typically accomplished through one of two processes: a close reading of relevant materials by the researcher and using coders.¹¹ In the first case, the researcher reads each text and notes essential elements that fit preexisting categories or elements that might give rise to emergent categories. Engaging in the reading alone can make for relatively quick and efficient qualitative content analysis. However, this qualitative content analysis process has two serious flaws: researchers may need to include essential details, or their agenda or research questions may skew their observations. To remedy these flaws, researchers may enlist the aid of additional “coders” in their analysis of texts. Using coders can be advantageous, as the researcher can demonstrate that multiple readers have reached similar conclusions. To effectively use coders, however, the researcher must be able to establish intercoder reliability, which indicates that the researcher and coders came to the same conclusions.

Third and last, the Comparative Analysis Methodology is valuable for evaluating the similarities and differences between EPLF's experiences and strategies during the Eritrean liberation movement and those of other liberation movements.¹² Thus, it will be employed to compare the diplomatic policies of the EPLF and ELF. Identifying the EPLF's historical events that are comparable in terms of ideology, strategies, or diplomatic engagements, then analysing and comparing them with the ELF's actions, policies, and outcomes with those of the selected comparative cases to identify patterns and differences to critically present the journey of the making of the Eritrean domestic and foreign policies.

To sum up, qualitative methods will be used to compare and draw conclusions about the EPLF approach's effectiveness and uniqueness. Each of the above-specified methodologies

⁹ Atkinson, 2017, p. 84

¹⁰ Ibid, 2017, p. 84

¹¹ Ibid, 2017, p. 85

¹² Pickvance, 2001, pp. 8-27

serves a specific purpose in this research, and they will be integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EPLF's historical evolution, ideology, and foreign policy.

The materials that form the basis of this study have been gathered from various sources. Secondary literature will be used, which entails academic text from books and journals. The primary sources used are newspapers, interviews, official documents, speeches, websites, and letters. The distinction between primary sources and secondary literature is crucial in historical studies. Primary sources represent historical materials that are analysed to answer the research question.

Most of the primary sources in this study are government documents and existing interviews previously transcribed and stored in the National Archive of Eritrea in Asmara (RDC) in Eritrea.- I will briefly provide a source criticism of these materials in the following paragraphs by categorising them into three parts to give a clear introduction to the reader about what types of primary sources I am using. I will give a detailed analysis of each source in chapters three, four and five following the introduction of each indicated chapter. I will thoroughly analyse each primary source before my argument and discussions to answer my research question.

Primary Sources and Primary Source Criticism

Primary sources are vital to understanding events. They serve as evidence in creating an interpretation and developing an argument to support it. Archival records are crucial in historical research as part of primary sources and content analysis.¹³ In addition to the primary source criticism I am outlining on this and the following pages, content analysis necessitates systematically investigating documents.¹⁴ Archival accounts and content analysis form the main feature of the research method in this study. Therefore, I collected historical materials from archives and analysed them to establish the mechanisms and processes that led to the foundations of the Eritrean People`s Liberation Front's ideological development and diplomatic policies. The primary data comprises archival documents and interviews executed and transcribed by interested individuals earlier and stored in the national archive to be used as sources for academic and historical consultancy.

¹³ Skemer, 1991, PP. 357-368

¹⁴ John Markoff, 1975, PP. 7-10

I collected the archival documents from Eritrea between July and August in the summer of 2023. The following are the lists of the main primary sources obtained: the First EPLF political manifesto titled *Our Struggle and its Goals* written in 1971; resolutions of the Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF – ELF (CL) of March 12-19, 1987, Resolutions and Recommendations of the first organisational congress of the EPLF which took place 23-31st of January 1977. Moreover, I used the transcribed speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe in a press conference held by the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977, who was the president of the Central Council and of the Executive Committee and the official spokesman of the ELF besides the head of the foreign mission of the ELF during the 1960s.

In addition to the above-stated primary sources, a video interview of Ashagre Yigletu, who was a Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia and led all the following peace mediation attempts representing the Ethiopian Government.¹⁵ The series of peace negotiations were as follows chronologically: the secret peace talk between EPLF and the Ethiopian government that repeatedly took place in Athens and Rome between 1983 and 1984;¹⁶ the mediation by the Carter Presidential Centre in Atlanta, Georgia, in August 1989, the Negotiation of November 1989 with the EPLF in Nairobi, along with Jimmy Carter and the representants of the EPLF led by Al-Amin Mohamed Seid¹⁷The last meeting planned for London in 1991,¹⁸ was unexpectedly interrupted while the delegates from both sides were already in their hotels. The EPLF and TPLF took over Addis Ababa and Asmara, and Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam, the president of Ethiopia, escaped to Zimbabwe.¹⁹ Yigletu, who continued his journey to the USA following that incident and was granted refugee status in the USA,²⁰ is an associate dean and MBA director at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, United States. In four consecutive interviews held from the first to twenty-three January 2019 in Washington D.C., with ESAT, an exiled Ethiopian TV led by journalist Sisay Agena, he briefly explained

¹⁵ The Carter Center News, 1989, p. 1-2

¹⁶ Yegletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engeda Dr Asagre Yegletu January 2019 part 1
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm6yr_ylsFQ

¹⁷ THE CARTER CENTER NEWS, 1989, p. 1-2

¹⁸ Yegletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engeda Dr Asagre Yegletu January 2019 part 1,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm6yr_ylsFQ

¹⁹ Keller, 1991, p. 7

²⁰ Ibid, 1991, p. 10

the diplomatic nature of the Ethiopian government and EPLF, emphasising the above-stated peace talks.²¹

Hence, these are three kinds of primary sources: the two kinds from the national archive in Asmara, Eritrea (RDC), which amplifies the research work from the EPLF and ELF perspectives, and the third one is the video interview of Ashagre Yigletu, who was a Deputy Prime Minister of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia which I was lucky to find this video which has four parts of ca. 45 minutes each and extraordinarily presents the Ethiopians' points of view on the Eritrean question of self-determination. These are the transcribed interviews of Issayas Afewerki, who was an Eritrean freedom fighter and served in various positions, starting from ordinary fighter up to Vice-Secretary General of EPLF as a political organisation in the period studied and currently president of the State of Eritrea since 1994.²² Documents of decisions, resolutions, and recommendations regarding the diplomatic, political and military developments of the EPLF, documents of peace negotiations between EPLF and the Ethiopian government initiated by external actors, documents of agreements of the Ethiopian democratic movements and the EPLF, collection of letters of Osman Salih Sabe who was head of the foreign affairs of the ELF mainly for the issues related to Arab countries²³ And interviews with Ashagre Yigletu, who led all five peace talks listed above and represented the Ethiopian government.

Categorising these sources into three distinct groups is valuable in developing an extensive analysis of the Eritrean liberation struggle and the challenges of building Eritrean diplomatic infrastructure. The first group of these sources contains documents and interviews produced by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). These sources help to comprehensively understand the organisation's ideology, vision, and decision-making processes. They cover various topics, including decisions, recommendations, reports, peace proposals, organisational constitutions, and party manifestos. They are designed to inform the public and the international community about the EPLF's goals and aspirations.

The EPLF produced these sources for multiple purposes: economic, political, diplomatic, and legal purposes. They are instrumental in shaping global perceptions of Eritrea's liberation struggle and provide insights into the EPLF's mission and its contribution to the Eritrean

²¹ Yegletu, 2019, *ESAT Yesamintu Engeda Dr Asagre Yegletu January 2019 part 1*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm6yr_ylsFQ

²² Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, March 5). *Isaias Afwerki*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isaias-Afwerki>

²³ Yasin, 2008, p. 46

liberation struggle. Additionally, these documents present the position and views of the enemy (Ethiopia) and its friends from the EPLF's perspective, skilfully defining the political and military position of the EPLF as a political organisation. The audience for these sources is vast, ranging from policymakers and diplomats to scholars and researchers (international community), and they offer a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the practical battle in the fields of Eritrea. In other words, they were seeking international attention.

The categorisation of sources into distinct groups provides a broader lens to understand the Eritrean liberation struggle and the challenges associated with building diplomatic infrastructure. The sources produced by the EPLF offer critical insights into the organisation's ideology, vision, decision-making processes, and contribution to the Eritrean liberation struggle. By understanding the EPLF's political and military position, policymakers, diplomats, and scholars can develop effective strategies to deal with it and build diplomatic infrastructure.

The second part of the primary source is the document produced by the ELF. These documents are transcribed interviews of Osman Salih Sabe, the principal figure in the ELF's foreign affairs, particularly with a significant influence in Arab countries.²⁴ In this interview, Osman Salih Sabe discussed regional and global affairs that had implications for the Eritrean liberation struggle.²⁵ He also expressed gratitude to the Arab countries on behalf of the ELF and the Eritrean people for the enormous financial, material, and moral support they contributed and directly criticised the EPLF elites, particularly his verbal attacks directed towards Issaya Afewrki.²⁶

In his written communication, Osman Salih Sabe emphasises the indispensability of securing support from Muslim nations for the Eritrean liberation movement. He asserts that Eritrea is a Muslim country and will continue to maintain its relationship with the Arab League.²⁷ However, despite Sabe and the ELF's extensive diplomatic and political efforts, most of the Eritrean populace genuinely aspired to establish a self-owned, inclusive, and secular revolution movement, which led to their disappearance.²⁸

²⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 412-414

²⁵ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

²⁶ Ibid, March-August 1977

²⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 414

²⁸ Ibid, 2011, p. 414

Osman Saleh Sabe, a key figure in the Eritrean liberation movement, employed a strategic approach to communicating with donors, primarily from Muslim countries.²⁹ His transcribed speeches focused on the regional, neighbouring, superpower and Eritrean internal affairs.³⁰ Besides, he expressed gratitude to donors through religious and ideological approaches and secured continued support for the Eritrean cause. At the same time, he upgraded his profile and influenced foreign diplomacy. This communication strategy can be analysed through public diplomacy and soft power. By employing religious and ideological appeals in his communication, Sabe aimed to create a favourable image of the Eritrean liberation movement in the donors' minds.³¹ This approach aimed to build relationships between the Eritrean movement and the donors and foster greater understanding and support for the cause.

Furthermore, Sabe's efforts to enhance his profile and influence foreign diplomacy can be seen as a form of soft power. Soft power means achieving objectives through attraction, persuasion, and influence rather than coercion or force. By presenting himself as a critical figure in the Eritrean liberation movement, Sabe sought to enhance his credibility and legitimacy, increasing his influence over foreign diplomacy. Sabe's communication strategy provides valuable insights into public diplomacy and soft power in achieving political objectives. By employing a strategic approach that combines both, he achieved his goals of securing continued support for the Eritrean cause and raising his profile as a critical figure in the movement.

The last and third part of the sources are video interviews of Ashagre Yigletu, produced in four parts from the first to twenty-three of January 2019 in Washington D.C., by ESAT, an exiled Ethiopian TV led by journalist Sisay Agena.³² The interviews were conducted in Amharic, the Ethiopian official language, and the interviewer is an Ethiopian citizen. Indeed, the interviews were conducted thirty years after the fall of the communist regime in Ethiopia. The same interviewee fled Ethiopia in 1991 and asked for asylum in the USA, where he still lives. In other words, the Eritrean struggle was concluded thirty years ago, producing an independent state of Eritrea in 1991.³³ Yigletu's interview focused on the diplomatic aspects of the Government of Ethiopia and the peace talks with the EPLF, besides briefly describing

²⁹ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

³⁰ Ibid, March-August 1977

³¹ Ibid, March-August 1977

³² Yegletu, 2019

³³ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xl

the diplomatic development between the Ethiopian government and the two superpowers, the USA and USSR, during the 1980s, in general, and the escape of Col. Mengistu who ruled Ethiopia from 1975 to 1991 to Zimbabwe.³⁴

Regarding Yigletu's interviews, one might question ingenuity or a change of mind due to the prolonged time. However, Yigletu was quite balanced in his interview, as I argued. In the interview, he took on two roles: one as an academic and one as a person who led the peace discussion from the Ethiopian side.³⁵ He presented the position of the USA (President Carter) as a central mediator and continued efforts to find a peaceful solution between the two parties. Besides what the Ethiopian government wanted, unlike before, during the last years of the 1980s, the Ethiopian communist regime was weakened and trying to find a way to negotiate with EPLF. According to Yigletu, this was due to internal factions, disagreement within the Ethiopian government, and reduced support from its principal ally, the USSR.³⁶

However, for Yigletu, finding a peaceful solution throughout all those meetings was difficult. Nevertheless, the secret meetings in Athens and Rome between 1983 and 1984 were more productive in developing points of argument for further discussions before coming to open and official peace talks led by the USA,³⁷ Mainly due to the Eritrean position or demands. According to Yigletu, Ethiopia was ready to negotiate by reestablishing a Genuine federation, which Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia officially dismissed in 1962, annexing Eritrea,³⁸ Yigletu said, «When I proposed federation as a means of a peaceful solution to end the war as I was told to provide that alternative by Col. Mengistu haile mariam, Afewerki replied Mr Ashagre do you know that federation means equal to selling one's nation or identity».³⁹

According to Yigletu, during those secret meetings in Athens and Rome from 1983 to 1984, the delegates from both sides agreed to start their negotiations on three main points when they came out publicly through the mediation of a third body.⁴⁰ Those points were Referendum, Federation and Regional Autonomy. Regarding the Ethiopian position, Yigletu said, «Federation was the first alternative to bargain with, and the last possibility they could

³⁴ Yegletu, 2019, *ESAT Yesamintu Engeda Dr Asagre Yegletu January 2019 part 1*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm6yr_yIsFQ

³⁵ Ibid, January 2019

³⁶ Ibid, January 2019

³⁷ Ibid, January 2019

³⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxv

³⁹ Yegletu, 2019, *ESAT Yesamintu Engeda Dr Asagre Yegletu January 2019 part 2*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm6yr_yIsFQ

⁴⁰ Ibid, January 2019

agree on was Regional Autonomy, and the EPLF would only accept Referendum». ⁴¹ Hence, as we can see from Yigletu's conversation, the advantage of those peace talks was their agreements to be available for continuous peace talks on the framework of the three main points they settled. On the other hand, there is a readable disadvantage of this framework, which is its rigidity. In other words, since the preferences and limitations of both parties are already sat, there is limited space for the mediators to play with the different negotiation mechanisms.

Secondary literature

The secondary literature used in this study can be divided into two categories: the first deals with empirical work about Eritrea and the journey of the Eritrean liberation struggle; these materials focus on the EPLF, ELF, the colonial era (the Italian and the temporary British administration), and the Ethiopian annexation. The second part of this literature deals with the theoretical and methodology conceptual framework.

Although most of the literature dealing with the Eritrean liberation struggle was produced for a purpose different from this research work, they are still valuable. The research accomplished during the liberation struggle targeted coping with the question of Eritrean self-determination. In other words, those studies investigated whether the Eritrean question was legitimate and whether the Eritrean people and the territory of Eritrean should be independent. They dealt with the issues concerning the fight between Ethiopia and Eritrea and, simultaneously, with universal human rights and international rules relating to decolonisation. Furthermore, they deal with the ongoing fighting among the three actors (the ELF, EPLF, and the Ethiopian government). Besides, they narrate the role and deeds of the interested regional actors (the neighbouring countries, the AU) and international actors (the USA, USSR, EU, UN, the Arab League) during the Eritrean liberation struggle.

However, four of the literature works, namely *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* by David Pool, published in 2001 by Ohio University Press, *The Eritrean struggle for Independence: domination, resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993* by Ruth Iyob published in 1995 by Cambridge University Press, *Against all Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* by Dan Connell published in 1993, in New York by the Red SEA Press Inc., *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea* by Dan Connell, Tom Killion, published in 2011 by

⁴¹ Yegletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engeda Dr Asagre Yegletu January 2019 part 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm6yr_yIsFQ

Scarecrow Press in Maryland, focus mainly about the EPLF and its struggle strategy and the general aspect of the EPLF from its early years until the liberation of Eritrea. This research paper analyses the Eritrean People's Liberation Front's (EPLF) ideological roadmap, emphasising its struggle strategy and diplomatic policies from 1977 to 1991, and this makes them vital or central supplementary literature to the primary sources.

Despite the limited direct benefits from the listed secondary literature, this study endeavours to reconstruct the essence of Eritrean policies during this time by exploring existing historical works. The research aims to comprehensively understand the EPLF's ideological vision and impact on the liberation struggle journey and decision-making policies by examining the above-listed primary sources, including official documents, speeches, and interviews of critical actors, and by combining empirical facts from the listed literature. The study also contextualises the EPLF's policies within broader historical and political contexts to offer a detailed understanding of Eritrean state formation and the challenges faced by revolutionary movements in the region.

Thus, the selected works of literature dealing with the empirical records about the Eritrean liberation struggle, focusing on the Eritrean liberation struggle, are *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* by David Pool published in 2001 by Ohio University Press, *The Eritrean struggle for Independence: domination, resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993* by Ruth Iyob published in 1995 by Cambridge University Press, *Eritrea: The Making of a nation 1890-1991* by Redie Bereketeab published in 2000 by Uppsala University, *Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Federal Experience* by Tekeste Negash published in 1997, by Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, in Uppsala Sweden, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea 1882-1941: Policies, Praxis and Impact* a doctoral dissertation by Tekeste Negash published in Uppsala in 1987, *Against all Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* by Dan Connell published in 1993, in New York by the Red SEA Press Inc., *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea* by Dan Connell, Tom Killion, published in 2011 by Scarecrow Press in Maryland, *Eritrea: A Colony in Transition 1941-1952*, by G.K.N. Trevaskis published by Oxford University Press. In 1960.

The EPLF's emergence during the early 1970s as a significant political entity during a critical period of the Eritrean liberation struggle represents a fascinating case study in the history of revolutionary movements.

I will define relevant terms and concepts that will enable me to systematically analyse the EPLF's strategies and policies. By doing so, I aim to demonstrate the importance of a theoretical approach in understanding revolutionary movements' emergence and development and how it can provide us with invaluable insights into the broader political and social contexts in which they operate. Besides, it helps us to understand the Eritrean liberation struggle's broader political and social context and its implications for similar revolutionary movements worldwide.

1.4 Theoretical Approach

This study's theoretical approach draws on Amilcar Cabral's ideas and his theoretical interpretation of the National Liberation Struggle. Amilcar L. Cabral (1921-1973) was an agronomist, nationalist leader, theoretician, and founder and secretary-general of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), who helped lead Guinea-Bissau to independence. On January 20, 1973, he was assassinated outside his home in Conakry by Guinea-native agents of Portuguese authorities, where his organisation had established its headquarters. In September of that year, the PAIGC unilaterally declared Guinea-Bissau's independence, formally achieved on September 10, 1974.⁴²

Cabral's leadership and organising skills were instrumental in the war of independence in Guinea-Bissau.⁴³ Cabral's ideas and theories influenced revolutionary socialists and national independence movements worldwide. His life and works continue to inspire scholars and activists to this day. In January 1966, he delivered his theoretical framework for the national liberation struggle, *The Weapon of Theory*, for the first time to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in Havana, Cuba.⁴⁴ Thus, his thoughts provide a valuable lens through which to analyse the Eritrean liberation struggle, particularly the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) policy objectives and strategies focusing on the period from 1977 to 1991.

According to Cabral, national liberation is the phenomenon in which a given socio-economic whole rejects the negation of its historical process. In other words, the national liberation of a people is the regaining of that people's historical personality, its return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected.⁴⁵ Cabral begins his analysis

⁴² Cabral, 2009, p. 1

⁴³ Wallerstein, 1971, pp. 63-65

⁴⁴ Cabral, 2009, p. 1

⁴⁵ Ibid, 2009, p. 10

by looking at this phenomenon historically concerning the social structure, one in which foreign domination is the principal contradiction. For him, both in colonialism and in neo-colonialism, the essential characteristic of imperialist domination remains the same: the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violent usurpation of the freedom of development of the national productive forces. This observation, which identifies the essence of the two apparent forms of imperialist domination, seems of major importance for the thought and action of liberation movements, both during the struggle and after the winning of independence.⁴⁶ As such, national liberation struggles require a comprehensive approach that involves political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions for revolutionary movements to achieve their goals successfully.

Cabral speaks on the indispensability of creating a firmly united vanguard, conscious of the true meaning and objective of the national liberation struggle it must lead. This necessity is all the more urgent since we know that with rare exceptions, the colonial situation neither permits nor needs the existence of significant vanguard classes (working class conscious of its existence and rural proletariat) which could ensure the vigilance of the popular masses over the evolution of the liberation movement.⁴⁷ On the contrary, the generally embryonic character of the working classes and the economic, social and cultural situation of the physical force of most importance in the national liberation of the peasantry do not allow these two primary forces to distinguish true national independence from fictitious political independence.⁴⁸ Only a revolutionary vanguard, generally an active minority, can be aware of this distinction and make it known to the popular masses through the struggle.⁴⁹

By the end of the 1960s, the Eritrean field of struggle lacked a well-modelled vanguard; the organisation desperately suffered from political and organisational strategy deficiency. Therefore, the EPLF was born out of this crisis with its new political manifesto and organisational program, published in 1971. These clearly defined the broader vision of transforming Eritrean society and creating a more just and equitable society through the EPLF's vanguard.⁵⁰ As a result, the EPLF's struggle policy objectives were grounded in a more comprehensive social and economic transformation vision, and its strategies were carefully crafted to advance this vision. Besides, these ideological foundations and

⁴⁶ Cabral, 2009, p. 10

⁴⁷ Ibid, 2009, p. 12

⁴⁸ Ibid, 2009, p. 12

⁴⁹ Ibid, 2009, p. 12

⁵⁰ Taylor, 2011, pp. 568-583

organisational and political programs of the EPLF were repeatedly reaffirmed and reiterated during the following organisational congresses of 1977 and 1987.⁵¹

On the question of the effects of imperialist domination on the social structure and historical process of local peoples, Cabral examines first of all the general forms of imperialist domination and identifies at least two forms: the first is direct domination, using a power made up of people foreign to the dominated people (armed forces police, administrative agents and settlers); this is generally called classical colonialism or colonialism is indirect domination, by a political power made up wholly or mainly of native agents; this is called neocolonialism.⁵²

In the first case, the social structure of the dominated people, whatever its stage of development, can suffer the following consequences: (a) total destruction, generally accompanied by immediate or gradual elimination of the native population and, consequently, by the substitution of a population from outside; (b) partial destruction, generally accompanied by a greater or lesser influx of population from outside; (c) apparent conservation, conditioned by confining the native society to zones or reserves generally offering no possibilities of living, accompanied by massive implantation of population from outside.⁵³

According to Cabral, the two latter cases must be considered in the framework of the problematic national liberation, and they are extensively present in Africa.⁵⁴ One can say that in either case, the influence of imperialism on the historical process of the dominated people produces paralysis, stagnation and even, in some cases, regression in this process. However, this paralysis is not complete. In one sector or another of the socio-economic whole in question, noticeable transformations can be expected, caused by the permanent action of some internal (local) factors or by the action of new factors introduced by the colonial domination, such as the introduction of money and the development of urban centres.⁵⁵

In the countryside there develops, with very varied intensity and always linked to the urban milieu, a stratum of small landowners.⁵⁶ In the case of neo-colonialism, whether the majority of the colonised population is of native or foreign origin, the imperialist action creates a local

⁵¹ See DOC of EPLF first and second organisational congress

⁵² Cabral, 2009, p. 8

⁵³ Cabral, 2009, p. 8

⁵⁴ Ibid, 2009, p. 9

⁵⁵ Cabral, 2009, p. 9

⁵⁶ Ibid, 2009, p. 9

bourgeoisie or pseudo-bourgeoisie controlled by the ruling class of the dominating country.⁵⁷ The transformations in the social structure are not so marked in the lower strata, above all in the countryside, which retains the characteristics of the colonial phase.⁵⁸ Still, the creation of a native pseudo-bourgeoisie, which generally develops out of a petty bourgeoisie of bureaucrats and accentuates the differentiation between the social strata and intermediaries in the commercial system (compradores) by strengthening the economic activity of local elements, opens up new perspectives in the social dynamic, mainly by the development of an urban working class, the introduction of private agricultural property and the progressive appearance of an agricultural proletariat.⁵⁹

These more or less noticeable transformations of the social structure, produced by a significant increase in productive forces, directly influence the historical process of the socio-economic whole in question.⁶⁰ While in classical colonialism, this process is paralysed, neo-colonialist domination, by allowing the social dynamic to awaken (conflicts of interests between native social strata or class struggles), creates the illusion that the historical process is returning to its regular evolution.⁶¹ This illusion will be reinforced by a political power (national state) composed of native elements. In reality, it is scarcely even an illusion since the submission of the local 'ruling' class to the ruling class of the dominating country limits or prevents the development of the national productive forces.⁶²

For Cabral, the fight for national liberation is divided into two phases: national and social.⁶³ The national phase focuses on securing national sovereignty or independence through an armed struggle, and obviously, a revolutionary movement needs leadership. Reflecting on the leadership issues, Immanuel Wallerstein, a famous American Sociologist and Economic Historian,⁶⁴ speaks about Cabral's thought of revolutionary leadership as follows. "Does Cabral then have a candidate for the leadership of the national liberation movement? He does, and it is a most extraordinary one, for it is totally unexpected in terms of the history of modern socialist thought. It is a segment of - the petty - bourgeoisie which he calls the

⁵⁷ Cabral, 2009, p. 9

⁵⁸ Ibid, 2009, p. 9

⁵⁹ Ibid, 2009, p. 9

⁶⁰ Ibid, 2009, p. 9

⁶¹ Ibid, 2009, p. 9

⁶² Ibid, 2009, p. 9

⁶³ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 46

⁶⁴ Genzlinger, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/10/books/immanuel-wallerstein-dead.html>

revolutionary petty bourgeoisie.⁶⁵ And how can these be identified? Of course by their commitment to the struggle against colonialism. But what about those still uneducated and uncertain? Among what groups will potential recruits be most likely to be found? Again, a surprising answer is among the *declassé*. But not just any *declassé*.”⁶⁶ The social phase concerns genuine liberation. It examines whether autonomy has led to economic and social benefits for most of the population and whether the new nation is genuinely accessible to determine its destiny.

Nzongola Ntalaya is an associate professor of political economy in the African Studies and Research Program at Howard University in Washington, D.C.⁶⁷ His article titled *Amilcar Cabral and the Theory of the National Liberation Struggle* highlighted Cabral's skilful analysis of his theory based on the theory of imperialism established by Lenin (1939), which states imperialism is a historical necessity in the development of capitalism.⁶⁸ In this context, Ntalaya explains briefly how Cabral showed how imperialism operates through various methods and forms of exploitation to achieve its permanent goal of subordinating the productive forces of underdeveloped countries to the needs and interests of the developed capitalist countries.⁶⁹

The three colonial powers (Italian, British and Ethiopian) consecutively manifested in various forms with basic imperialist similarities had exploited the Eritrean people and did all possible means to destroy its historical existence from 1889 to 1961, as introduced in chapter two of this master thesis under colonial legacy. Hamid Idris Awate, leading the first ELF actions, began the Eritrean Armed struggle in 1961 to liberate his people from the colonial yoke. However, due to its elite's extreme religious and regional attitudes, the ELF suffered from divisions and internal factions from 1965 to 1969 and fragmented into different small organs. Nevertheless, a new organisation that gradually developed into EPLF in 1971 was born from this internal crisis under the leadership of Issayas Afewerki, a highly secularist and anti-regionalist figure. Afewerki developed a strong revolutionary vanguard leadership, triumphing in the independence of Eritrea in 1991. Thus, it is this historical journey that the above-explained theory will investigate.

⁶⁵ Wallerstein, 1971, p. 65

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 1971, p. 65

⁶⁷ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 43

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 1984, p. 44

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 1984, p. 44

1.5 Challenges of the Study and Safety Strategies

As an Eritrean citizen raised and trained under the leadership of the EPLF and an active member of the PFDJ (People's Front for Democracy and Justice) since 1995, I am mindful of the fact that the ongoing conflict with Ethiopia and least included ELF's legacy in the Eritrean studies may influence my perspective, just as any historian is situated in historical context. This leads to questions regarding the neutrality of my arguments on this issue. To ensure impartiality, I must remain self-aware and critically reflect on any personal biases that may subtly shape my interpretations, just as any historian would. This introspective approach helps to uphold the integrity and credibility of the discourse, leading to a more detailed and inclusive understanding of the subject matter.

Thus, I have made every effort to maintain an objective point of view, and all arguments presented are based on the available evidence. I have attempted to include the opinions and perspectives of all parties involved in the Eritrean liberation struggle between 1961 and 1991, focusing on the period between 1977 and 1991.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The present study acknowledges certain limitations in its methodology. While extensive archival materials and other listed sources have been used to provide a balanced representation of the circumstances, it remains imperative to have included interviews with key individuals within the Dreg's decision-making committee (the previous Ethiopian government was overthrown in 1991). Notably, I had initially planned to conduct interviews with Dawit Wolde Giorgis, Governor of Eritrea from 1979 to 1983, Goshu Wolde, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia from 1983 to 1986, and Ashagre Yigletu PhD, Deputy Prime Minister of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia during the last era of The Dergue Government. Unfortunately, unforeseen family matters prevented the realisation of the travel plan from Norway to the USA.

However, I was fortunate to discover a video interview of Ashagre Yigletu, produced by ESAT Broadcasting, an exiled Ethiopian TV station in the USA. This interview covers a sizeable portion of the peace negotiation trials between the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Ethiopian government led by the USA, as well as the final meeting in London a few days before the liberation of Eritrea. Hence, the Ethiopian government's perspective towards the Eritrean question of independence can be discerned based on this interview and other secondary literature. This has facilitated a more comprehensive and nuanced

understanding of the issue from the Ethiopian government's point of view and enables me to make reasonable arguments.

1.7 Research Questions and Scope of the Study

Considering the problem mentioned above, the project strives to answer the following three research questions.

- How did the EPLF formulate its foreign policy objectives from 1977 to 1991, and what ideological and strategic considerations influenced these objectives?
- What diplomatic strategies and alliances did the EPLF employ to advance its foreign policy agenda, and how did these strategies evolve?
- How did the EPLF engage with the international community and advocate for its cause during its struggle for independence, and what role did international actors play in shaping its foreign policies?

The research focuses on the period from 1977 to 1991, representing a pivotal period in the history of the Eritrean liberation struggle. During this period, we witnessed significant events, such as the first national congress of the EPLF in 1977 and the eventual culmination of the battle with the establishment of the independent state of Eritrea in 1991. The 14-year period under investigation was crucial in shaping Eritrea's foreign and domestic policies during the larger liberation struggle that extended from 1961 to 1991. The study also examines the period before 1977, providing a historical background for the crucial period under investigation. This research seeks to provide a detailed analysis of the Eritrean liberation struggle from 1977 to 1991. It intends to identify the main actors of the struggle during this period and provide a comprehensive understanding of how it evolved and ultimately culminated in establishing the independent state of Eritrea.

1.8 Terms and Concepts

To avoid biases and uncertainty, it is crucial to be explicit about the meanings and definitions of the main terms and concepts used throughout this research work. The meaning of the terms and concepts is commonly highly contested. Besides, the meanings vary from one context to another or from one theoretical angle to another and can be easily employed with many variable derivations.

1.8.1 Annexation: An annexation is a formal act whereby a state proclaims its sovereignty over territory hitherto outside its domain. Unlike cession, where territory is given or sold through a treaty, annexation is a unilateral act made effective by actual possession and legitimised by general recognition.⁷⁰ Annexation is frequently preceded by conquest and military occupation of the conquered territory, and the same happened to the Eritrean case, where the Ethiopian army unilaterally invaded Eritrea in 1961 by revoking the previously installed federation of 1952.⁷¹

1.8.2 Secularism: The term secularism can be interpreted broadly. However, for convenience, in this master's thesis, I will focus on political secularism. Political secularism per se does not need to share the same negative assumptions about religion nor assume any progressive historical development that will make religion increasingly irrelevant. It is compatible with a positive view of religion as a moral good or an ethical communitarian reservoir of human solidarity and republican virtue. But political secularism would like to contain religion within its own differentiated "religious" sphere and would like to maintain a secular public democratic sphere free from religion.⁷²

This is the basic premise behind any form of secularism as statecraft doctrine, the need to maintain separation between "church" and "state," or between "religious" and "political" authorities, or between the religious and "the political." But the fundamental question is: How are the boundaries drawn and by whom? Political secularism falls quickly into secularist ideology when the political arrogates for itself absolute, sovereign, quasi-sacred, quasi-transcendent character or when the secular arrogates for itself the mantle of rationality and universality while claiming that "religion" is non-rational, particularistic, and intolerant (or illiberal) and as such dangerous.⁷³

1.8.3. Imperialism: Imperialism is defined as a particular dominance of one collective, usually a nation, over another. Basic is how the centre in the imperialist nation establishes a bridgehead in the centre of the dominated nation by tying the two centres together using harmony of interest. In the more potent form of imperialism, this system is protected by keeping the two peripheries apart, usually by having less inequality in the dominating nation

⁷⁰ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023, November 28). annexation. Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/annexation>

⁷¹ Johnson, 1981, pp. 183-184

⁷² Casanova, 2009, pp. 1057-1058

⁷³ Ibid, 2009, pp. 1057-1058

than in the dominated nation. In connection with this, two mechanisms of imperialism are then defined. One is the pattern of vertical interaction whereby the dominating nation enriches itself more due to the interaction process than the dominated nation. The idea of spin-off effects in the developed nations, when they exchange manufactured goods for raw materials from underdeveloped nations, is fundamental in contemporary imperialism in its neo-colonialist forms. The second mechanical element is the feudal interaction structure, whereby the dominant nations in the periphery are kept apart, with little communication and trade among themselves.⁷⁴

1. 9 Organisation of chapters

The present thesis consists of seven chapters, each arranged chronologically to ensure logical coherence and simplify comprehension. By applying a chronological approach to the thesis structure, I am optimistic that the reader can follow the development of events over time and appreciate the significance of each chapter within the broader context of the research.

Besides, his approach helps to maintain the coherence of the master thesis by providing a clear and logical progression of ideas from one chapter to the next.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The initial chapter of this study provides a brief overview of the research problem and the central issues discussed. It explains the significance and relevance of the research in both academic and practical contexts. The sources of data and research methodology used in executing the study are clearly outlined, and the theoretical framework guiding the analysis and interpretation of the data is also discussed in detail. The chapter also acknowledges and addresses the challenges encountered during the research process and the limitations and compels ingrained in the research work design. Ethical research is conducted, particularly in sensitive contexts, and safety measures implemented are explained adequately. The research questions and the scope of the study are clearly defined, providing a roadmap for the subsequent chapters. Key terms and concepts relevant to the study are described and illuminated to enhance reader understanding. Finally, the chapter highlights the structure and organisation of the subsequent chapters, providing a preview of the thematic progression.

Chapter 2: The Background of Eritrea

⁷⁴ Galtung, 1971

This chapter presents an in-depth investigation of the historical backdrop of Eritrea. It examines the colonial history of Eritrea, which was under the rule of the Kingdom of Italy, Great Britain, and the Ethiopia annexation. The section explores how colonial history has shaped the development of Eritrea, including its political, economic, and social landscape. In addition, the chapter digs into the emergence and evolution of liberation movements in Eritrea. It highlights the ideological differences and external influences that have contributed to the rise and fall of the two principal political parties in Eritrea (the ELF and EPLF). The chapter also analyses the impact of these movements on the political and social changes that have taken place in Eritrea. Overall, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the historical background of Eritrea, emphasising the various factors that have contributed to its current state.

Chapter 3: Emergence of the EPLF (1970)

In this chapter, I will discuss the emergence of the EPLF (a political party or organisation). This political organisation played a significant role in the Eritrean struggle for independence and has led the country since its independence from Ethiopia in 1991. The chapter starts with an introduction that provides a contextual background of the emergence of the EPLF. It also examines the ideological foundations of the EPLF, which were based on Marxism-Leninism, anti-imperialism, Maoism, and secularism combined with the principle of the national liberation struggle. Furthermore, the chapter analyses the leadership dynamics, internal conflicts, and factionalism within the ELF, which led to the emergence of the EPLF as a substitute in the Eritrean field of struggle. It also discusses the organisational structure within the EPLF.

Chapter 4: Political Landscape, Regional Dynamics, and the Role of Major Powers

Chapter four of this master's thesis analyses the political landscape, regional dynamics, and major powers' role in shaping Eritrea's political course. The chapter commences with an introduction that offers an overview of the political landscape and regional dynamics, highlighting the critical geopolitical factors and power structures that have a bearing on Eritrea's political scenario. The chapter then examines the role of superpowers and regional actors in influencing Eritrea's political dynamics, digging into the complex interplay of forces that shape the country's political landscape. Furthermore, the chapter explores the role of neighbouring countries in shaping Eritrea's political dimensions, analysing the various political and economic connections between Eritrea and the neighbouring countries. The

chapter provides a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the political landscape and regional dynamics that have shaped Eritrea's political scenario since 1970, illuminating the various factors influencing the country's political journey.

Chapter 5: EPLF's Foreign Policy Objectives and Strategies

This section of the research excavates into the foreign policy objectives and strategies of the EPLF, providing a detailed analysis of its diplomatic efforts and strategic alliances, as well as its engagement on the international platform. Besides, it contextualises the EPLF's foreign policy objectives and explains its comprehensive goals, which aim to advance the interests of Eritrea and its people. The EPLF has forged strategic alliances with various countries and organisations to achieve its foreign policy objectives and has engaged actively in diplomatic forums and negotiations. The chapter examines the EPLF's approach to diplomacy and its engagement with international organisations and other states, underlining its role in shaping international relations. By reviewing the EPLF's foreign policy strategies, the chapter provides a broader understanding of the organisation's goals and objectives, emphasising its approach to foreign policy and providing insights into the dynamics of international relations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The last section of this master's thesis is the conclusion, which comprehensively overviews the research work's essential findings and insights. It provides a concise summary of the primary conclusion drawn from the research and revisits the research questions initially posed at the study's beginning. Moreover, it critically evaluates the extent to which the research questions have been addressed in the study. Finally, the conclusion synthesises the study's findings. It discusses their broader implications for the academic field and their potential contributions to existing knowledge, mainly to national liberation struggle movements.

Chapter - 2

The Background of Eritrea

2.1 Introduction

As indicated on the cover page, this master's thesis deals with the Eritrean liberation struggle and the EPLF ideological roadmap (1977-1991). However, Midri Bahri (former Name for Eritrea) and its society have existed for centuries before the birth of the EPLF, like many other civilisations, securing its rich cultural and historical diversity in the strategic and

volatile region of the world, the Horn of Africa.⁷⁵ Before the arrival of the European colonisers in the 19th century, the territory of today's Eritrean was governed by Bahri Neghestat (Kings of the Sea)⁷⁶ As a direct consequence of the decline of the Axumite Kingdom, which was mainly centred in southern Eritrea and the northern part of today's Ethiopia, the Tigray region, with Adulis, its central commercial port city founded in the Red Sea, Eritrea was the fulcrum of the Axumite kingdom.⁷⁷ The Axumite kingdom had influenced most of the areas occupied by the countries of the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia) and parts of today's Yemen and Saudi Arabia until its demise in the seventh century AD.⁷⁸

Indeed, with the fall of the Axumite Kingdom, parallel to the appearance of the Bahri Neghestat (kings of the Sea) in the highlands of Eritrean, other small kingdoms came into existence in Ethiopia. For this master's thesis, I will focus on the two Sematic Kingdoms established in Ethiopia's Tigray and Amhara regions.⁷⁹ For a straightforward reason, these two Kingdoms had a direct and continuous encounter with the Bahri Neghestat of Eritrea. The power of influence was always variable or shifting among these three Kingdoms. Unfortunately, during the arrival of the Europeans (the Italians through the Red Sea route and the British via Sudan) in the region, there was intense disagreement among King Yohannes IV of Tigray, King Menelik of Amhara regions, and Raesi Woldemichael Solomon of Hazega, the governor of Midri Bahri.⁸⁰ These conflicts among the regional Kingdoms on one side and the diminishing role of the Ottoman Empire in the Red Sea region on the other side with the opening of the Suez Canal, which directly attracted the attention of European powers towards new imperialist ambitions,⁸¹ Helped the Italians gain smooth access to the highlands of Eritrea via the Red Sea.

Therefore, to give the reader a clear guide, this background chapter will begin by providing a clear and concise chronological historical introduction to the legacy of colonialism in Eritrea. It will continue to introduce the origins of the early movements of the Eritrean liberation struggle following the end of the Second World War as part of the broad decolonisation issue

⁷⁵ Amare, 1989, p. 1

⁷⁶ Connell D. T., 2011, xxx-xxxi

⁷⁷ Ibid, 2011, xxix

⁷⁸ Ibid, 2011, xxix

⁷⁹ Ibid, 2011, xxx-xxxi

⁸⁰ Ibid, 2011, xxxi-xxxii

⁸¹ Houghton, 1869-1870, p. 88

and as a direct outcome of the Eritrean federation with Ethiopia in 1952.⁸² Extremely complex ideological and sociocultural features accompanied the Eritrean liberation struggle that extended officially from 1961 to 1991 until the birth of the highly centralised political organisation (EPLF) in 1970.⁸³ Thus, in addition to the Emergence of Liberation Movements abroad in 1958,⁸⁴ I will briefly explain the Ideological Differences, the Influences of external actors, Challenges, and Internal Dynamics and Sociocultural and Ethnic Complexity during the years extending 1961 to 1969 to create a transparent connection to the next chapter, that is the emergence of the EPLF and defining the EPLF's ideology.

2.2 Colonial Legacy

Colonialism is a historical force that has profoundly impacted nations worldwide, shaping their identities, economies, and political landscapes. Eritrea, located in the Horn of Africa, is no exception to this global phenomenon.⁸⁵ The colonial legacy in Eritrea is a complex narrative stretching out over time and space, mainly encompassing Italian and British temporary administration following the defeat of the Italians from the Horn of Africa in 1941⁸⁶ And the Ethiopian and Eritrean federation in 1952.⁸⁷ These three eras (the Italian, British, and Ethiopian) are decisive in shaping the nation's history and subsequent fight for independence and understanding Eritrea's sociopolitical aspect.

Following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the connection of the Mediterranean to the Red Sea,⁸⁸ the European superpowers came across a new hemisphere of competition as part of their dominant ambitions. Between 1869 and 1880, an Italia Navigation company called Rubattini made its way from the port city of Genova in Italy to the Red Sea coast of Eritrea through the Guidance of Padre Giuseppe Sapeto (a famous Italian missionary who lived from 1811 to 1895, member of the order of San Lazzaro and travelled the shores of the Red Sea, the middle east and the highland of Ethiopia and Eritrea) and purchased a piece of land from the local Afar sultan of the Red Sea coast near the Assab (the port city of Eritrea).⁸⁹

⁸² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. xxxiv-xxxv

⁸³ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii

⁸⁴ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxv

⁸⁵ Kibreab, 2008, pp. 97-106

⁸⁶ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxiii

⁸⁷ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxv

⁸⁸ Houghton, 1869-1870, p. 88

⁸⁹ Eritrea. (2023, January 21). *New World Encyclopedia*, . Retrieved 10:03, January 23, 2024 from <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Eritrea&oldid=1096624>.

In 1882, the land bought from the Afar sultan was officially transferred to the Kingdom of Italian ownership.⁹⁰ As a result of this event, the Marina (Italian naval force) and Italy's troops landed in Massawa, another coastal area north of Assab, and many other places in 1885.⁹¹ Before the arrival of the Italians, the Ottoman Empire (Turkish) had a moderate influence in the coastal areas of the Eritrean Red Sea, mainly represented by the Egyptian tax collectors known as Naibs (an Arabic word for 'Deputy or 'Representative of an Authority').⁹²

However, when the Italians arrived in the coastal areas of the Red Sea, they did not face meaningful resistance from the Egyptians and Turks or the Ottomans at Massawa, and reactions by the Ethiopians (Tigray and Amhara kingdoms), which Normally collaborated with the Bahri Negasi were ignored. The Italian forces were systematically spreading out from Massawa toward the highlands of Eritrea until they surprisingly came to face a bloody war organised by the Ethiopian and Eritrean united forces led by Ras Alula of Tigray in Dogali in the eastern lowlands of Eritrea a few km away from Massawa on the way to Asmara on 26 January 1897.⁹³ Crossing all the challenges mentioned, the Kingdom of Italy declared control of Eritrean in 1889.⁹⁴ It occupied the territory of Eritrean until its defeat by the British forces of East Africa in 1941.⁹⁵

2.2.1 Italian Colonialism (1890-1941)

Ambitious ventures and infrastructural development marked the Italian era. Eritrea was considered a jewel in Italy's crown of imperial aspirations.⁹⁶ As a result, substantial financial and material sources were cascaded into the region, creating Italian Eritrea. Several cities like Asmara, Keren, Assab, Massawa, and Agordet saw the construction of grand architectural marvels that still stand today as a testament to the colonial period. Besides, numerous agricultural and agro-industrial areas like Elabered,⁹⁷ Agordet, Aligidir and Ginda are among the best and first agricultural areas engineered by the Italians. Nevertheless, this colonial attempt was not without its challenges.⁹⁸ The Italian colonial administration was directed to control the local population, leading to forced labour and oppression.

⁹⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxii

⁹¹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxii

⁹² Ibid, 2011, p. 192

⁹³ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxii

⁹⁴ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxii

⁹⁵ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxiii

⁹⁶ Bereketab, 2000, pp. 111-131

⁹⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 194

⁹⁸ Ibid, 2011, pp. 322-324

Despite the infrastructure development, the benefits were unevenly distributed, with many Eritreans experiencing economic disparities. Besides, schooling or education was limited. This means the local population could only study up to fourth grade.⁹⁹ Besides, like many other colonisers' policies, the Benito Mussolini colonial rule being a fascist regime, less fortunate laws were adopted against the indigenous Eritreans. Italians were not allowed to contact the local population to maintain the purity of the Italian race.¹⁰⁰ Brothels were required to employ only Italian ladies. Technically, the Italian laws of segregation were like the South African apartheid rules. One of the evillest deeds of the Italian colonial rules, which any Eritrean still remembers, was that Eritreans or any person of black colour was not allowed to be on the main street of Asmara, the capital city.¹⁰¹ If any black individual is caught walking on the capital city's main street, they face severe punishment.

The impact of Italian colonialism was not confined to the physical landscape. It had a profound effect on the collective memory and identity of Eritreans. The legacy of Italian rule is still visible in Eritrea's culture, cuisine, and dressing style, mainly in Asmara (the capital city of Eritrea) architecture, farming, bureaucracies, and language. Indeed, many Italian words are mixed and used daily in many sectors of the country.¹⁰² Italian influence has ineradicably impacted the nation's sociocultural fabric, mainly the food industry, the construction, and the auto mechanics sectors. Regarding the daily language, Italian is almost used everywhere, mostly mixed with the Tigrigna language, which is spoken by fifty per cent of the Eritrean population. Words like Camicha, Forchetta, Ochiale, Luce, Piatti, and Fognatura (English meaning Shirt, Fork, Eyeglasses, Light, Plate and Sewerage) are a few examples of daily used common words.

The Kingdom of Italy's ambitions in Eritrea were deeply rooted in imperial expansionism and economic interests, like those of many other European imperialists of that time. Eritrea's strategic location along the Red Sea coast rendered it an envied prize for Italian imperialism in the Horn of Africa. This strategic target led to substantial investments in the region, thus facilitating its transformation into Italian Eritrea.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 323

¹⁰⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, 2011, p. 322

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 2011, p. 324

¹⁰² Ibid., 2011, 347

¹⁰³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 321-325



Some of the Italians' amusing architectural and urban skills historically connect Rome and Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea.¹⁰⁴

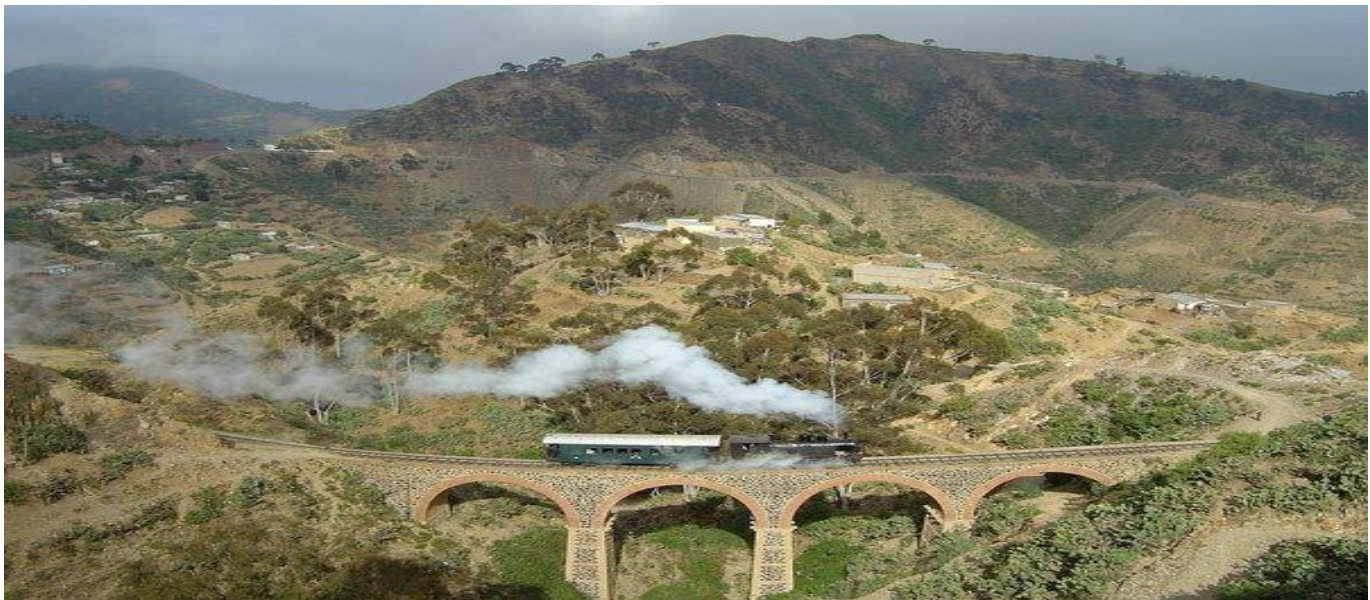
The Italian fingerprints are most perceptible architecturally in Asmara, Eritrea's capital. The cityscape is embellished with a distinguishing array of architectural beauties, a testament to the Italian colonial administration's architectural tastes and ambitions.¹⁰⁵ Notably, the city boasts an impressive ensemble of Art Deco, Rationalist, and Futurist architectural styles that continue to captivate observers and underscore the artful impact of Italian colonialism. Thus,

¹⁰⁴ UNESCO, *Asmara: A Modernist African City*, 2017

¹⁰⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 77-78

in 2017, Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, became a UNESCO heritable modernist African city thanks to the various initiatives and skilful works of the Italians mentioned above.¹⁰⁶

Under the aesthetic beauty, Italian colonialism was accompanied by a wave of infrastructural development that fundamentally altered Eritrea's physical landscape. The Italians meticulously constructed roads and railways, connecting all the main cities and towns of the country and ports to expedite the flow of goods and resources in and out of the country. This substantial investment in infrastructure gave rise to enhanced connectivity within Eritrea and neighbouring regions countries like Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Sudan via land route and far beyond the neighbouring or regional nations through maritime transport, setting the stage for economic expansion and broader communications.¹⁰⁷



Partial picture of the Railway built by the Italian Kingdom somewhere near Asmara around Arberobu (mountainous and stiff landscape)¹⁰⁸

The railway project, launched in 1888 in Massawa, the port city of Eritrea in the eastern part of the country, can be considered the first development project in the new colony. It reached Asmara in the highlands of Eritrea in 1911.¹⁰⁹ Besides, the Massawa-Asmara cableway (*Telefonica*) was the longest in the world when inaugurated in 1937;¹¹⁰ however, the British later dismantled it following the defeat of the Italians from Eritrea in 1941 as war reparations

¹⁰⁶ UNESCO, 2017

¹⁰⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 513

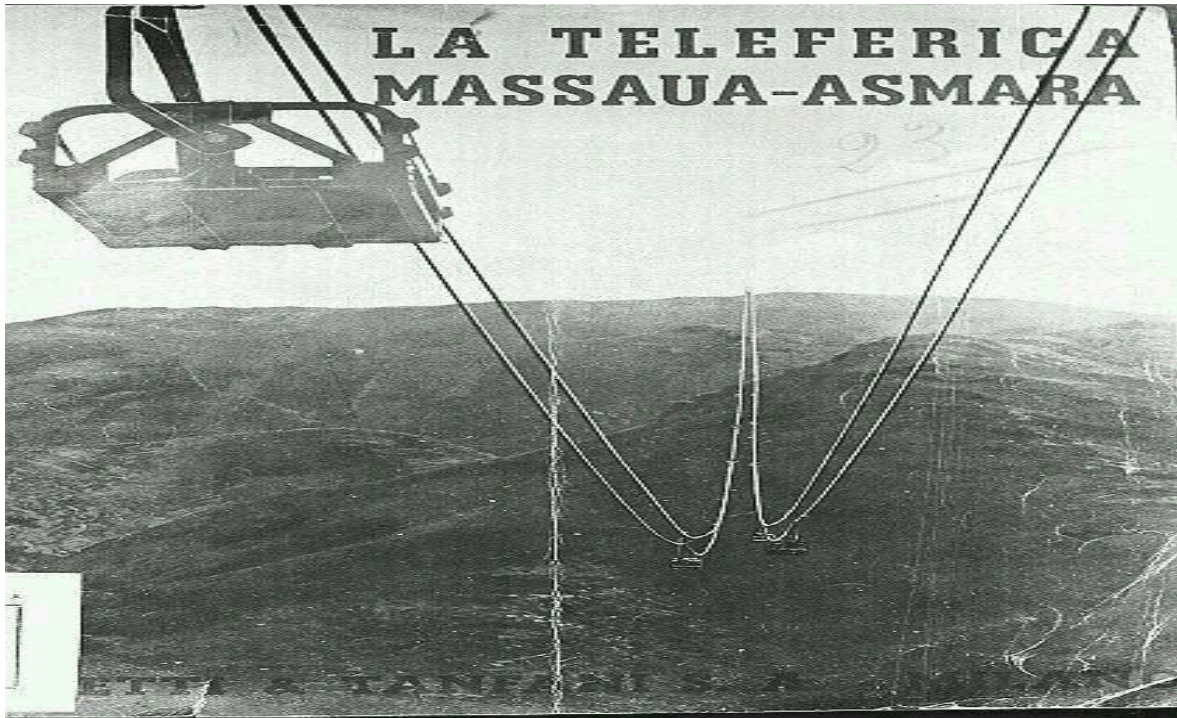
¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 2011, pp. 436-437

¹⁰⁹ Pike J. (2015, June 30). *Italian Colonisation 1890-1941*. Global Security Org.

<https://www.globalsecurity.org/index.html>

¹¹⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 249

and transported it to Kenya, Egypt and Sudan, which they had already stationed as colonisers in these countries before the second world war.¹¹¹ Besides major infrastructural projects, the colonial authorities invested significantly in the agricultural sector.



The 115-km cableway connecting Massawa to Asmara was built by Italians and inaugurated in 1937 under the Mussolini administration of Italy. It was the world's longest cableway at the time. The British forces destroyed this technological and historical infrastructure.¹¹²

Nevertheless, parallel to its segregation rules,¹¹³ Italian colonialism in Eritrea oversaw the provision of urban amenities in many metropolitan areas like Asmara, Massawa, and Keren, which employed numerous Eritreans in public sectors, particularly in the municipalities, the police and public works departments.¹¹⁴ Besides, thousands of Eritreans were concurrently registered to serve in the military, serving during the Italo-Turkish War in Libya, the first and second Italo-Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Wars and the Second World War, particularly in the Horn of Africa on the side of the Italian army.¹¹⁵ This shows the double standard of Italian colonialism that strives to use the local workforce to fill its gaps by providing limited opportunities.

¹¹¹ The Embassy of the State Eritrea Washington DC-USA. (2020, Jun 11). *Our History: British Colonization 1941-1951*. <https://us.embassyeritrea.org/>

¹¹² Information E. M., 2014

¹¹³ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 97

¹¹⁴ Podesta, 2011, pp. 205-231

¹¹⁵ Wilcox, 2021, pp. 70-75

Economic diversification appeared as a foundation of Italian colonial policies in Eritrea. Agriculture, mining, and industry sectors were actively promoted and modernised to tackle the region's resources and raw materials to benefit the Italian administration. The Italian Eritrea administration opened several factories that produced buttons, cooking oil, pasta, construction materials, meat, tobacco, brewery, hide, and other household commodities.¹¹⁶ In 1939, there were 2,198 factories, mainly employed Eritrean citizens.¹¹⁷ The establishment of industries also increased the number of Italians and Eritreans residing in the cities. The Italian population living in the augmented from 4,600 to about 64,000 in five years, and with the involvement of Eritreans in the industries, trade and fruit plantations were expanded across the nation; these late developments with the increase of the Italian civil population gradually began to allow Eritreans owned some of the plantations.¹¹⁸ However, these undertakings introduced advanced techniques and technologies, precipitating complex socioeconomic consequences, including disparities in wealth distribution and labour practices.

Therefore, it is central to emphasise the distinctive impact of Italian colonialism across Eritrea's geographic reach. Coastal regions, enjoying more excellent proximity to the central administration areas, endured the most development initiatives, witnessing extensive infrastructure and economic growth. On the contrary, the hinterlands showed variations in the transformation, mirroring the region's geographic and demographic diversity.¹¹⁹ Beyond the realms of architecture, economy, and infrastructure, Italian colonialism left an enduring cultural and linguistic imprint on Eritrea. Elements of Italian culture, including language, cuisine, and societal norms, pervaded Eritrean society and persist in various forms today. The linguistic influence of Italian is particularly notable, with a segment of the Eritrean population proficient in the language, attesting to the deep-seated impact of colonialism on language dynamics.¹²⁰ Apart from the colonial segregation rules, which drew a line of separation between the Italians and the indigenous population, the Italians divided the indigenous population among themselves in terms of urbanised and non-urbanised. In other words, those who lived in the urban areas were considered more advanced than those who lived in the hamlets or villages. Unlike the British, who divided the population according to their religion and tribal background, the Ethiopian government made a carbon copy of the

¹¹⁶ Eritrea, 2009

¹¹⁷ Bereketab, 2000, pp. 116/117

¹¹⁸ Araya, 1991, pp. 169-177

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 1991, pp. 174-180

¹²⁰ Larebo, 1990, pp. 11-31

British divide-and-rule system by dividing the population between the highlanders, most Christians, and the lowlanders, almost all considered Muslims.

2.2.2 British Administration and Post-World War II Era (1941-1952)

The years following World War II marked a pivotal chapter in Eritrea's history. Following Italy's defeat in World War II, Eritrea transitioned from Italian colonial rule to the temporary British administration. This period, characterised by complicated geopolitical dynamics and Eritreans' aspirations for self-determination, holds profound historical significance.¹²¹ Thus, this sub-chapter will offer an in-depth study of the multidimensional impact of British administration in Eritrea during the post-World War II era, emphasising its economic, political, and sociocultural dimensions.



British soldiers arrived in Keren city via Sudan during World War II, which was the last front for the defeat of the Italians in Eritrea in 1941¹²²

According to the facts on the ground and the Eritrean narration, the British administration in Eritrea accommodated itself in the Italian villas, well-structured Italian bureaucracy, and infrastructural facilities. It launched double standards, a divide-and-rule system hidden under economic development, and a modernisation program.¹²³ The British colonial policy, best known as a divide and rule policy, was the same in Eritrea, like in many African and Asian countries colonised by the UK. When it came to Eritrea, the British administration soon began to inject a conflict or division between Muslims and Christians and between the

¹²¹ Poscia, 1989, pp. 27-53

¹²² Narayanan, 2020

¹²³ Tafla, 2005, pp. 7-20

highlanders and lowlanders. The British introduced some changes to facilitate these agendas, like upgrading the school system from fourth to eighth grade, which was an excellent opportunity to advance education and culture. Besides, they began to motivate the local population to organise themselves under different political parties and civic organisations.¹²⁴

The temporary British administration had never initiated or continued existing economic activities or substantial investments related to infrastructural developments, including constructing roads, railways, and telecommunications systems; instead, they destroyed most of the existing infrastructure, including railways, industries, and cableways.¹²⁵ These activities facilitated economic hindrances in the country's developmental perspectives and intensified illegal activities domestically and across borders towards the neighbouring countries. These illicit activities are related to various individuals or groups of bandits intentionally armed by the British administration and instructed to fight against each other and crush the existing traditional norms.¹²⁶ It looks like it could be more apparent to present the two aspects of the British administration simultaneously.

There is a crucial truth that no one can negate, and that is that the British administration permitted the Eritreans to participate in their national affairs and discuss their political, social, economic, and religious matters. The birth of the early political movements in 1943, led by Fitawarari Gebremeskel Woldu, can be seen as an excellent example of their kind.¹²⁷ Lists of the political parties that came into existence following the consent of the British freedom of expression and organisation are Mahber Fiqhri Hager, Rabita el-Islamia al-Hurra, Hibret or Andinet (Unionist party), Eritrea for the Eritreans, and the country-partitioning part (pro-Italy) reducing the Eritrean developmental projects installed by the Italians to the minimum level and creating politically toxic spots among the nine ethnic groups was one of the temporary British administrations and its allies' primary goals.¹²⁸

This is to lay the groundwork for the intended future annexation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in such a way that to concretise for the conspiracy in progress behind closed doors to show to the representatives of the UN that Eritrean cannot govern itself; therefore, it needs the Ethiopian's support and the Eritrean people for their benefit they have united with

¹²⁴ Tafla, 2005, pp. 7-9

¹²⁵ Eritrean, 2020

¹²⁶ Tafla, 2005, pp. 7-8

¹²⁷ Ibid, 2005, pp. 8-15

¹²⁸ Tafla, 2005, pp. 7- 8

Ethiopia.¹²⁹ Dr Bairu Tafla, a professor of history at the University of Hamburg in Germany, in his article titled *Eritrea, in Retrospect*, explained skilfully the British plan to divide or partition the Eritrean society in the name of freedom of expression.¹³⁰ In other words, they encourage people to establish religion-based political parties and instigate conflicts among different ethnic groups and regions.

The political landscape of Eritrea underwent several transformative shifts during the temporary British administration. A crucial turning point appeared with establishing a UN trusteeship framework for Eritrea in 1945 following the defeat of the Italians in the Horn of Africa. Under this framework, Eritrea was placed under UN administration, with the explicit objective of guiding the territory towards self-determination.¹³¹ The trusteeship framework brought the aspirations of Eritreans for self-determination to the forefront of international attention. The Eritrean people, who had long yearned for independence, welcomed this development with optimism. However, it also uncovered the complexities of managing divergent political visions within Eritrea, which emerged and developed during the British administration.¹³²

The political landscape witnessed the emergence of various political factions, each embracing distinct visions and strategies for Eritrea's future. For example, the Unionist party wished for a union with Ethiopia, the nationalist movements demanded self-determination, and pro-Italian groups asked for Italian trusteeship.¹³³ These factions reflected the complex interplay of ideologies and interests that characterised Eritrea's political atmosphere during this era. The trusteeship framework was both hope and a source of complexity. It ignited Eritrea's self-determination aspirations in the international arena and caused political divisions and rivalries that would shape the nation's future. The emergence of various political divisions during this period signified the challenges of uniting diverse visions within a tiny single country.

In the economic sector, the initiatives undertaken by the British administration did not produce remarkable results that could be recorded in Eritrean history.¹³⁴ The Italian colonisation initiated and installed all the infrastructure in Eritrea. However, the increase in

¹²⁹ Connell D. T., 2011, p.137

¹³⁰ Tafla, 2005, pp. 8-11

¹³¹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 521-522

¹³² Ibid, 2011, 519-520

¹³³ Ibid, 2011, 519-520

¹³⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 135-136

schooling levels from 4th to 8th grade is another positive aspect of the British administration.¹³⁵ Thus, this academic progress initiated during this era significantly contributed to the nation's economic development and self-sufficiency in subsequent decades. Besides, the freedom of expression given to society to loud their voices and discuss issues related to national affairs apart from the toxic agendas hidden within these given freedoms that antagonise the society with the need for everyone want to dominate, these two steps can be seen as constructive action.¹³⁶

The legacy of the British administration in Eritrea had many different aspects. It left an unforgettable imprint on the nation's economic landscape; the British destroyed numerous industrial spare parts, cableways extending from Massawa to Asmara, and most of the railway stretching from Massawa to Bisha, originally constructed between 1887 and 1932.¹³⁷ Simultaneously, the British laid the foundation for complex political dynamics and external interventions. It set the stage for a problematic future that serves as a historical point of view to examine the complexities of colonialism, geopolitics, and the people's aspirations for self-determination. Eritrea's post-World War II era was a profound transformation and complexity under British administration.¹³⁸ It left a legacy that continues to shape the nation's historical narrative and underscores the tangled dynamics of colonial heritage and geopolitical interests in shaping the Eritrean future, ceding the floor to the Ethiopian expansionist ambitions.

2.2.3 Ethiopian and Federation (1952-1962)

The Ethiopian annexation of Eritrea in 1952 marked a critical turning point in the history of both nations; this reshaped their courses and introduced complex geopolitical dynamics that influenced the whole region (the Horn of Africa).¹³⁹ To understand this event, it is vital to consider the Eritrean historical backdrop. As said in this chapter, Eritrea was an Italian colony from the late 19th century until the end of World War II. This means that as part of the African scramble by the Europeans, the territory of Eritrean became a colonial belonging of the kingdom of Italy due to the Wuchale treaty signed between King Menelik of Ethiopia and Count Pietro Antonelli, representing the kingdom of Italy on May 2, 1889.¹⁴⁰ Following

¹³⁵ Makki, 2011, pp. 424-425

¹³⁶ Tafla, 2005, pp. 7-15

¹³⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 321-324

¹³⁸ Ibid, 2011, pp. 135-137

¹³⁹ Ibid, 2011, pp. 249-250

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 2011, pp. 321-322

Italy's defeat in the Second World War in the Horn of Africa in 1941,¹⁴¹ the Allied powers took control of Eritrea, placing it under British administration.

Eritrea's future appeared to be a controversial issue in the post-war era. Eritreans aspired to self-determination, envisioning an independent nation. However, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, soon after his return from exile, where he stayed as an asylee in Great Britain from 1936-1941 when Mussolini of Italy invaded Ethiopia,¹⁴² Came with new territorial expansionist ambitions over Eritrea, viewing Eritrea as an integral part of Ethiopian history. However, legal documents show that his predecessor, King Menelik, signed an agreement which explicitly stated that Eritrea was not part of Ethiopia and gave his blessing to the Italians to colonise Eritrea under one precondition that they must stay beyond the Mereb River (a river that separates Eritrea and Ethiopia and flows into Sudan). Indeed, the ambitions of Emperor Haile Selassie were strongly supported by the allied forces and, above all, by the USA due to the growing tensions in the Red Sea (between the USA and USSR).¹⁴³ Later, the USA signed a defence agreement with Ethiopia in 1953, setting up one of the most significant US marine bases in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, with nearly 3200 military personnel.¹⁴⁴

To go further with the issue, the UN set up a Commission of five countries (Norway, South Africa, Burma, Guatemala, and Pakistan) during the fourth session of the General Assembly to investigate the Eritrea case. However, the commission did not produce a concrete recommendation; it presented three proposals. The proposals are as follows: Norway favoured the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia, South Africa, and Burma favoured the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, Guatemala, and Pakistan, favouring the UN trusteeship that could lead to the independence of Eritrea after ten years.¹⁴⁵ Besides, the USA adhered to the federation issue due to its policy and security interest in Eritrea, and the UN approved the federation with two-thirds. As a result, in 1952, the United Nations (UN) determined Eritrea's fate, granting Eritrea considerable autonomy under the Ethiopian Federation.¹⁴⁶ While recognising Eritrea's distinct identity, this decision did not address the aspirations of Eritreans for complete independence.

¹⁴¹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxiii

¹⁴² Ibid, 2011, p. xxxiii

¹⁴³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 9-10

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 2011, p. 436

¹⁴⁵ Andargatchew, 1980, pp. 99-100

¹⁴⁶ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 249-250



Picture of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia visiting Kagnew Station in Asmara.¹⁴⁷

Contrary to what was presented in the federation pact, the subsequent years saw a gradual erosion of Eritrea's autonomy and the consolidation of Ethiopian control. In 1962, Emperor Haile Selassie dissolved the Eritrean Parliament and formally annexed Eritrea, effectively ending the federation.¹⁴⁸ Eritreans were subjected to Ethiopian rule. The Ethiopian annexation of Eritrea had far-reaching political consequences. It ignited a protracted and bloody armed struggle for independence led by Eritrean liberation movements, most notably the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the first ten years following the official start of the Eritrean liberation struggle on September 1, 1961.¹⁴⁹ Where Hamid Idris Awate shot the first bullet on the top of Mountain Adal and later by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the armed struggle has endured for decades, inflicting heavy human and material costs, besides the never-healing psychological and physical wounds caused by the Ethiopian army up on the Eritrean civilians.

The annexation generated debates and diplomatic tensions internationally. Eritrea's struggle for independence became a focal point for the global decolonisation movement.¹⁵⁰ The Ethiopian government faced criticism for its policies in Eritrea, including allegations of human rights abuses. The socioeconomic impact of the annexation was profound. Eritrea, once characterised by a distinct identity and a measure of self-governance, was subject to

¹⁴⁷ Picture taken from RDC (Archive of Eritrean Research and Documentation Centre in Asmara)

¹⁴⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxv

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxv

¹⁵⁰ Haile, 1987, pp. 11-12

Ethiopian policies that often favoured the interests of the central government, neglecting the autonomous Eritrean administration that gradually affected the federal agreements.¹⁵¹

Economic resources were redirected toward Ethiopia, leading to disparities in development between the two regions. Besides, Eritreans, particularly those who had been part of the Eritrean civil service during the federation, faced challenges as they were integrated into the Ethiopian system. Many Eritreans experienced political marginalisation and discrimination.¹⁵²

Understanding the colonial legacy and related symptoms of colonial deeds within Eritrean society is fundamental to grasping the context within which the Eritrean People's Liberation Movement appeared and traversed the complex historical terrain. It highlights the actions of Eritrean actors in shaping their destiny and informs the broader narrative of Eritrea's struggle for independence. The colonial legacy in Eritrea is not a static epoch in history but a continuously moving force that resonates in the nation's contemporary identity, diplomacy, and politics.¹⁵³ It is a reminder of the complexities of colonialism and the enduring legacy it leaves on the countries it touches.

Ethiopia's federation in 1952 further aggravated the colonial legacy in Eritrea.¹⁵⁴ This marked another crucial turning point, as Eritrea was soaked into Ethiopia's territories, triggering decisive resistance and a veritable quest for self-determination. In retrospect, the colonial legacy in Eritrea has various critical features and a complicated fabric. It includes the infrastructural development brought by Italian colonialism, the challenges experienced by the local population, and the enduring impact on Eritrean culture and identity. It also consists of the challenges and aspirations that emerged during the British administration,¹⁵⁵ such as the appearance of different civic and political organisations and different ambitions and ideological ends among the principal political parties. The Unionist, nationalist, Muslim League, and pro-Italian can be listed at the forefront of that time's political organisation.¹⁵⁶

The temporary British administration, known for its divide and rule policies, was at its best in worsening the already complicated Eritrean issue due to the two polarised superpowers' interest in the Red Sea (the USA and USSR) and the question of decolonisation. From 1949

¹⁵¹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 249-250

¹⁵² Ibid, 2011, pp. 10-11

¹⁵³ Uoldelul, 2007, pp. 257-271

¹⁵⁴ Ghebre-ab, 1993, p. 201

¹⁵⁵ Kibreab, 2008, pp. 104

¹⁵⁶ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 423

to 1950 there had been registered numerous violent clashes between Christians and Muslims.¹⁵⁷ Besides, the government of Emperor Haileselassie gradually started to kill and arrest Eritrean citizens, mainly following the resignation of Tedla Bairu, the first president of Eritrean, who served from 1952 to 1955.¹⁵⁸ All the above-listed burdens and related matters on the Eritrean population awakened the Eritrean intellectuals and individuals with nationalist thoughts. In early 1958, Eritreans began to organise themselves underground and move with secret operations against the Ethiopian establishment in Eritrea.¹⁵⁹ These movements would be the cornerstone of the future liberation movements.

Finally, in commenting on and presenting the three different colonial eras and their legacies, I want to remind those who may have read this research work that the way the different actors presented is not meant to honour one and dishonour the other. But merely presented the various aspects of them as colonisers based on the empirical facts; besides, one vital thing to remember while reading the text is that the primary goal of this master thesis is the detailed study of the EPLF ideological roadmap and the making of the Eritrean state from ground zero parallel to the liberation struggle that extended from 1961 to 1991 with a particular focus from 1977 to 1991, during which the EPLF overtook the liberation struggle and shaped the Eritrean fate.

2.3 Emergence of Liberation Movements (1958)

The emergence of liberation movements in Eritrea during the mid-20th century represents a crucial chapter in the nation's history. These movements, most notably known as the Mahber Shewate or Haraka (Groups of Seven Men), were the most prominent ones that created the early groundwork for the subsequent liberation movements. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), which overthrew and substituted the ELF, played a vital role in reshaping the struggle to its original purpose. The emergence of liberation movements in Eritrea must be understood within the broader historical context. Eritrea, a country with a distinct cultural and historical identity, had been under Italian colonial rule from the late 19th century until the end of World War II.¹⁶⁰ Following Italy's defeat in the Second World War, Eritrea went under British temporary administration, setting the stage for political uncertainty.

¹⁵⁷ Miran, 2005, pp. 206-207

¹⁵⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 493-494

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 2011, pp. xxxv

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 2011, p. 321

The United Nations (UN) 1952 decision to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia rather than grant it complete independence sowed the seeds of discontent in the Eritreans' sentiments.¹⁶¹ The newly born and still operationally and politically toddler International organisation (The UN) used the Eritrean case as a subject of an experiment. Ethiopia, a close ally of the winners of the Second World War, used its diplomatic tools by promising the US a strategic position in the Red Sea to curb the growing tension between the eastern and western blocks that had fully succeeded in annexing Eritrea.¹⁶² Eritreans who had aspired to self-determination found themselves exposed to Ethiopian rule under Emperor Haile Selassie. This political arrangement became a catalyst for the emergence of liberation movements.

The UN decision to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia and the subsequent dissolution of Eritrea's autonomy fuelled resentment among Eritreans who felt their aspirations for self-determination had been denied.¹⁶³ The Ethiopian government's policies in Eritrea, including cultural assimilation and land redistribution, worsened grievances among the Eritrean population. Intellectuals, students, and dissidents began to organise politically, advocating for Eritrean independence. This nascent political activism laid the foundation for the formation of liberation movements. Eritrean nationalism, fuelled by a strong sense of cultural identity and a need for self-governance, encouraged individuals to seek independence and an armed struggle.

The liberation movements needed a clear strategic outline and political roadmap during this era. This stage of the movement, generally known as the second stage, took place from 1952 to 1961; the population responded by augmenting their peaceful protests. In the initial years, the broad popular resistance was mainly in the cities and lacked organisational leadership. Following the repression by the Ethiopian authorities, it became impossible to demonstrate peacefully. The above-stated fact and the political consciousness of the active individuals who participated in these movements pushed the formation of clandestine cells. At the same time, other individuals who left the country due to the Ethiopian repression organised political organisations in exile.

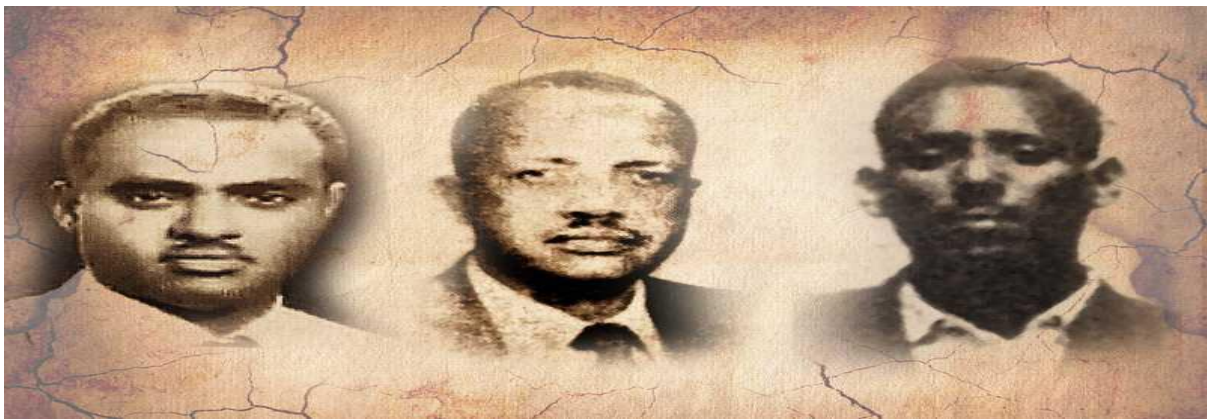
Around 1958, some individuals actively engaged within the Eritrean underground movements created the Eritrean Liberation Movement called *Haraka* in Arabic and *Mahber Shewate* in

¹⁶¹ Connell D. T., 2011 pp. 249-250

¹⁶² Ibid, 2011, pp. 525-527

¹⁶³ Ibid, 2011, p. 249

Tigrigna, Eritrean language, which means Association of Seven Men or individuals.¹⁶⁴ The name indicates that the group was organised in secret cells of seven members, each assuming the leadership of the national resistance movement. Haraka became the primary vehicle for Eritrean resistance against Ethiopian rule until Hamid Idris Awate officially started the Eritrean armed struggle in 1961.¹⁶⁵ The principal aim of the ELM (Eritrean Liberation Movement) was to strengthen national unity, curb religion and ethnic-based divisions, and form a successful clandestine movement that would lead to an armed revolutionary struggle.¹⁶⁶ Within the next three years, Haraka had reached almost all principal cities and organised clandestine groups in Asmara and other cities of Eritrea.



Three of the founders of ELM in Port Sudan in 1958, left to right: Mohamed Said Nawud, Saleh Ahmed Iyay, and Yasin Aqeda. Idris Mohammed Hassan and Said Sabr are not included in this picture.¹⁶⁷

Two years before the birth of Haraka in 1956,¹⁶⁸ Memhir Woldeab Woldemariam, a principal figure in the movement for the independence of Eritrea who escaped a seven-time assassination attempt by the Ethiopian security and finally fled to Egypt, started his radio broadcast in Tigrigna from Cairo, the capital city of Egypt. Unfortunately, the pressure from the Western governments, mainly the USA, on the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein, who led Egypt from 1954 to 1970, forced Woldeab Woldemariam to stop his broadcast.¹⁶⁹ The reason for halting the Radio Broadcast was that the Ethiopian government asked its ally, the USA, to pressure Egypt so that it could restrict the Eritrean liberation movement in Cario.

¹⁶⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 10-11

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 2011, pp. 288-289

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 2011, p. 11

¹⁶⁷ Azentawi, 1958, [Eritrean Liberation Movement \(ELM\) Established \(zantana.net\)](http://zantana.net)

¹⁶⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxv

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 2011, p. 192-193

Egypt was among the principal and early supporters of the Eritrean struggle alongside Syria, Sudan, and Iraq.¹⁷⁰ Thus, many of the young nationalist activists and students fled to Egypt and began organising and creating a network with the widely scattered Eritrean activists at home and abroad. Moreover, within a short period, Woldeab's voice from Cairo had already reached the Eritrean spaces and awakened the national feeling among most of the population in and outside Eritrea. Besides, the increased number of Eritreans studying in Egypt made it impossible to block the waves of the Eritrean nationalist movement that decisively gave energy to the movement to establish the ELM in 1958,¹⁷¹ which soon led to the start of the armed struggle inside Eritrea.

However, due to various challenges, the ELM was neutralised. One of the main factors that led to the transformation of the ELM into a new political organisation called ELF, which was established in 1960 by the same people who founded the ELM, was the need to develop a visible and organised military struggle inside Eritrea. The ELM was engaged in covert operations on different enemy (Ethiopia) targets inside Eritrea. This means operations are usually organised and calculated outside Eritrea. The members of Hareka or ELM are sent via Sudan to execute their duty in collaboration with other colleagues who live inside Eritrea and work as secret agents of Hareka to study and plan enemy targets properly.

Therefore, after two years of various covert operations and continued discussions of the need to develop a practical armed liberation movement inside Eritrea, the same people who started ELM by discussing with other Eritrean activists in Egypt and Sudan agreed to establish the armed struggle inside Eritrea. This became the first official armed struggle movement inside Eritrea, with the first bullet shot by Hamid Idris Awate on September 1st, 1961,¹⁷² on the mountain, Adal in the Gash Barka region, followed by ten men. This is in the western region of Eritrea, bordering Sudan.

¹⁷⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 193

¹⁷¹ Venosa, 2013, pp. 43-48

¹⁷² Pateman, 1990, p. 81



Woldeab Woldemariam was a leading figure in the movement for the independence of Eritrea.¹⁷³

2.3.1 Ideological Differences and External Influences

The struggle for Eritrean independence was marked not only by the common goal of liberation from Ethiopian rule but also by distinct ideological differences that defined the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the later Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).¹⁷⁴ These ideological disparities were pivotal in shaping the two movements' strategies and trajectories. The ELF, founded in 1960, was a political organisation that later developed into an armed fighting group. It initially championed a nationalist and broad-based approach to Eritrean independence. Its ideology was grounded in Eritrean nationalism and the aspiration for self-determination.¹⁷⁵

The ELF sought to unite Eritreans across religious and ethnic lines under the banner of Eritrean identity. It emphasised preserving Eritrean cultural and historical identity and viewed Eritrea as a distinct nation with a right to self-determination and independence.¹⁷⁶ However, these ideological roadmaps and struggle strategies for a country like Eritrea, which is in a strategic location that attracts various actors and with a population equally divided into Christians and Muslim believers, were very clear that these struggle strategies would not let the ELF survive longer. Hamid Idris Awate genuinely dreamed of a free Eritrea and did not live until the later division era. The following quote is taken from his speech, the evening before the day he shot the first bullet in mountain Adal.

¹⁷³ Azentawi, 1952, https://zantana.net/confederation_of_free_eritrean_labor_unions_was_founded/

¹⁷⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp.11-13

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxv

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 2011, pp. 210-216



Hamid Idris Awate was the founder of the Eritrean armed struggle.¹⁷⁷

*Today, we are here to fight the enemy, not only because they humiliated and usurped our land, but to write a proud and honourable history for Eritrea. We are here to challenge the occupation authorities with all their weapons and armies and tell them that we will not accept after this day the life of humiliation and disgrace. We are determined, supported by all the great Eritrean people, to move forward on the path of struggle and martyrdom until liberation.*¹⁷⁸

Hamid, a national hero, passed away one year after he proclaimed the armed struggle in 1962 while fighting with emperor Haileselassie's soldiers who were positioned to hunt him in the Gash Barka region of western Eritrean, specifically a tiny village called Haikota.¹⁷⁹ His death exploded the Eritrean liberation movement's magnitude against the Ethiopian domination, opposite to what the Ethiopian government expected.

Comparing the struggle strategies adopted by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in their fight against Ethiopian rule reveals two

¹⁷⁷ Weldemichael, 2020, <https://shabait.com/>

¹⁷⁸ Farajat, 2011, <https://english.farajat.net/?p=5641>

¹⁷⁹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 289

divergent approaches. The ELF's Broad-Based Unity strategy entailed mobilising diverse segments of Eritrean society, including urban elites, students, and peasants, to form a united front against Ethiopian rule.¹⁸⁰ The ELF's struggle approach was decentralised principally and tended to be inclusive. It emphasised the combination of diplomatic efforts mainly oriented towards Arab countries due to the religious orientation of its top leaders.¹⁸¹ to garner international support for the armed struggle against Ethiopian forces.

In contrast, the EPLF's revolutionary approach was more centralised and ideologically driven. It focused primarily on social transformation to create a solid, inclusive national liberation movement. According to the EPLF, this social transformation begins with a class struggle based on Marxist and nationalist liberation principles. This makes it easier to create a classless society as the first step towards social justice and strict discipline within its organisational structure, characterised by centralised control and militarily efficient revolutionary vanguard.

The ELF sought to present itself as the legitimate representative of the Eritrean people, opposite to what it had developed practically on the battlefield only within five years of its initial years from 1961 to 1965. Tremendous divisions and disagreements occurred within its leadership or political organ, mainly established in Cairo and Kassala, the eastern city of Sudan bordering Eritrea.¹⁸² As part of its decentralisation programme, the ELF came up with the idea of creating a decentralised military division, which is region-based, which means the ELA (Eritrean Liberation Army) should be divided into five regions or zones of command.¹⁸³ Indeed, this marked the beginning of the fall of the ELF.

The Supreme Council of the ELF, with its headquarters in foreign countries, mainly in Cairo and Kassala, established the ELA division into five different regional military commands. The ELF copied and pasted the broadly admired Algerian Revolution model for national liberation.¹⁸⁴ The Algerian national liberation struggle model mainly employed region-based mobilisation, in which each region had to organise itself and execute its administrative and military activities on its own account. It had to synchronise with other regional commands for broader national action.

¹⁸⁰ Johnson, 1981, 187-191

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 1981, 187

¹⁸² Markakis, 1988, p. 57

¹⁸³ Ibid, 1988, p. 56

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 1988, p. 56-57

The architectures of this struggle strategy, copied from the Algerian model, needed to be more practically aware of the Eritrean social, cultural, religious, and colonial historical background and its legacies. They have seen the superficial and theoretical aspects of the Algerian model and thought that this creates positive competition among the regional commands and attracts more and more fighters to the field of struggle. Through this, the ELA can expand its space to cover a wider part of Eritrea by augmenting the number of fighters. Indeed, the plan had one positive outcome: the ELA gained more fighters and expanded its nationwide outreach. At the same time, the regional model brought adverse outcomes, aggravating the ethnic and religious divisions injected by the temporary British administration.¹⁸⁵ This created an uncurable wound in the ELF's national liberation movement strategy and army unity in the following three years, up to the Aredaib meeting in 1968.¹⁸⁶ The whole ELF organisational structure was gradually cracking.

The Aredaib meeting, which took place from 14 to 16 June 1968, was attended by leaders of the five divisions of the ELA.¹⁸⁷ It was attended by commanders and political commissioners of all the five regional divisions. At this time, the 5th Division had no commander or deputy commander in the field and was represented by the newly appointed young political commissioner, Isayas Afeworki.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the Aredaib meeting was seen as more inclusive due to the commanders' participation in all five divisions, and numerous recommendations and plans were passed. One of the critical issues raised at Aredaib was the proposal by Omar Izaz of the 2nd division. Omer Izaz asked the participants to elect a new joint field command board for all five divisions. However, his idea was not welcomed due to the fear that the leaders based in Kassala and Cairo may consider it disobedience.

Due to the continued frictions that resulted from this decentralised ELF policy, three months later, another meeting occurred from September 11 to 18, 1968,¹⁸⁹ at Arota in Ansaba, commonly known as the Ansaba meeting. Delegates from the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Divisions attended it. In November 1968, a group of the ELF from Sudan met in Gedaref.¹⁹⁰ This group formed a central committee and called for change in the field, including the dissolution of the ethnic and region-based divisions of the ELA. The era of division ended with the

¹⁸⁵ Tafla, 2005, pp. 8-11

¹⁸⁶ Team, 2005, p. 8

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 2005, p. 8

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 2005, p. 8

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 2005, p. 8

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 2005, p. 9

military conference of Adobha that took place from 10 to 25 August 1969,¹⁹¹ with 162 participants from all five divisions who finally agreed to dissolve the ethnic and region-based military division and set provisional general command (*Kiyad Ama*). *Kiyad Ama* was composed of 38 men, with 10 seats assigned each for the 1st and 2nd divisions and 18 seats together for the 3rd, 4th, and 5th divisions.¹⁹²

2.4 Conclusion

Therefore, as we have seen, the ELF's national liberation movement strategies were not adequately studied and complied with the Eritrean societal landscape. To begin with, its political organ was established and located outside Eritrea, partly in Egypt and Sudan, where it was controlled remotely and highly influenced by these nations' ideological and strategic needs. Second, its military operation and organisation did not have a central command, which means it tried to import other nations' struggle experiences, like the Algerian Model,¹⁹³ which does not fit the facts on the Eritrean ground—in other terms, established the Eritrean Liberation Army into different regional divisions based on ethnic and religious backgrounds. In this context, Cabral's theory of national liberation completely rejects the introduction of any dogmatic principles or imported models of revolutionary struggle.¹⁹⁴ These and other related problems developed the era of division and prolonged disagreements between the ELF elites from 1965 to 1969.

However, following the Adobha military conference and the end of the era of divisions, mainly with the return from China after the advanced military and ideological course of individuals like Issayas Afewerki and his colleagues,¹⁹⁵ a new style of internal conflict began. ELF began to hunt and kill most of the newly appearing reformative elites who were ideologically charged from China. When the group returned from China, most of the leaders of the 5th division were killed by the ELF. From 1968 to 1971,¹⁹⁶ although Issayas and his group had been in progress in forming a party, it wasn't easy to realise, and they were working on a mass base. In 1971, they officially established the EPLF and developed the controversial and most discussed political manifesto, *Our Struggle and its Goals*.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ Team, 2005, p. 9

¹⁹² Ibid, 2005, p. 9

¹⁹³ Markakis, 1988, p. 56-57

¹⁹⁴ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 50

¹⁹⁵ Connell D., 2001, pp. 348-349

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p 350

¹⁹⁷ Poo, 1980, p. 44

Chapter - 3

The emergence of the EPLF (1970)

3.1 Introduction

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) holds a complex and controversial position in the collective consciousness. While many people admire it, at the same time, others revile it. The EPLF has played a critical role in the Eritrean liberation struggle and subsequent governance, which has earned it both praise and criticism. The EPLF represents resilience, determination, and sacrifice to most of the Eritrean population, symbolising hope and empowerment during decades of struggle against oppression and colonisation.¹⁹⁸ Its revolutionary ideals, effective organisation, and military victories gave it a respected status among those who advocated for Eritrea's independence.

However, the EPLF's legacy is also marked by controversy. Critics often highlight allegations of authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and suppression of those who have different opinions during its leadership as the ruling party in independent Eritrea.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, Western nations, led by the USA, have repeatedly accused the EPLF of supporting terrorism and destabilising activities in the region. These accusations have resulted in various sanctions imposed by the United Nations since 2009.²⁰⁰ They further fuelled the polarised perceptions of the EPLF's role and legacy in the Horn of Africa. Nonetheless, those accusations have never been verified. As a result, they have been lifted with the disappearance of the TPLF from the Ethiopian political platform in 2018,²⁰¹ which was the primary architect of these accusations as a local agent for the USA in the Horn of Africa. This was followed by Aby Ahmed's coming as Ethiopia's prime minister, who won the Nobel Prize for Peace Initiative and solved the Ethio-Eritrean border conflict in 2018.²⁰²

Thus, in this chapter, I will attempt to clearly define the ideological and philosophical origins of the EPLF as a political organisation. I will also briefly present the ideological conflicts within the ELF before its birth, which later came into existence because of its division into five regional military commands.²⁰³ Furthermore, I will deeply investigate how the EPLF was

¹⁹⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 223-229

¹⁹⁹ BBC, 2018

²⁰⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xliv

²⁰¹ Council, 2018, pp. 1155-1156

²⁰² Allo, 2018

²⁰³ Connell D. T., 2011, P. xxxv

founded and the challenges it faced during the period studied in this master thesis, 1977 to 1991, and the previous ten years, from 1966 to 1976, as a background history to forming the EPLF. In so doing, I will study what ideological and strategic considerations influenced the EPLF's objectives.

3.2 Defining EPLF's Ideology and Origins

To explicitly inform the reader, the purpose of this chapter is not to investigate the EPLF's or Eritrean government's policies and political structures in independent Eritrea (since 1991) but to study the origins and developments of the EPLF ideology, particularly from 1977 to 1991. Proceeding straight to the point, what is EPLF? How was it established? Why was it established? When was it started as an organisation? Who were the principal founders of the EPLF? The main issue of discussion is how these founding features and values of the EPLF were harmonised with the broader liberation movements to establish continuity. Hence, here comes the freedom fighter Issayas Afewerki and his first political manifesto called *Nihnan Ilamanan*, published in 1971,²⁰⁴ which will be used as a primary source for this master's thesis, particularly in this chapter. It will be analysed as follows.

Nihnan Ilamanan

Nihnan Ilamanan is the title of the EPLF's first and most controversial political manifesto, made public in March 1971.²⁰⁵ This document will be used as a primary source for this chapter. *Nihnan Ilamanan* means «Our Struggle and its Goals. » It was written by the principal actor of the EPLF (indeed, it is not clear who wrote it, but it represents the EPLF ideology), who divorced from the *Kiyad El Ama* (General Command), which was established following the *Adobha* Meeting in 1969,²⁰⁶ as collective leadership in the struggle to curb the years of division within the ELF from 1965 to 1969.

These groups, or the founders of the EPLF, who produced the above-stated manifesto and went further to establish the EPLF, were mainly represented by Issayas Afewerki, a Christian highlander. Issayas joined the field of struggle in 1966 as a second-year university student from Addi Abeba University.²⁰⁷ Within one year, he was sent to China for advanced military and ideological training alongside colleagues like Ramadan Mohamed Nur, Mesfin Hagos,

²⁰⁴ *Nihnan Ilamanan*, document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, November 01, 1971

²⁰⁶ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxvi

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 2011, p. xxxv

and others in 1967.²⁰⁸ In the mid-1980s, Issayas applied a similar strategy as Mao during the Cultural Revolution in sidelining everybody who was not completely loyal to the EPLF working mechanism.²⁰⁹ However, upon the return of these individuals from China, an intense ideological and struggle strategy disagreement appeared between the returnee and the leadership of *Kiyad El Ama*. *Kiyad El Ama* started to hunt them; the General Command killed many of the new elites charged with Maoist ideology and their followers. Nevertheless, some of these elites, such as Issayas, Mesfin, Romedan, and others, managed to escape the ELF's persecutions and went through different places and challenges until they were able to reorganise themselves and establish the first phase of the EPLF in 1971.²¹⁰ Some went to Barka and took the name Obel (Gash Barka), and the others went to the caves of Ala and became the Ala Group (part of the Akele Guzai region not far from Asmara). The third group went to *Dankalia*, crossed to Yemen, and called themselves the Aden Group.²¹¹

*The Chinese idea from the beginning was to give us this idea through their training, but only two of the ones who went – Isaias and Romedan, who met each other there – looked at the Chinese experience to see how Eritrea could benefit from it. For them, it was enlightenment to see that the Chinese Revolution had gone through a lot of problems, some of them similar to ours.*²¹²

The Aden group, or the group with Romedan Mohamed Nur, stayed a few months in South Yemen, which at the time was a socialist during the Yemen civil war.²¹³ In Yemen, they had the opportunity to meet with different radical leftist and Arab nationalist movements. They discussed their future steps and how to reshape the Eritrean liberation struggle. However, due to the lack of agreement on common goals, Umaro, Romedan, and Mahmud Sherifo sailed back to the Dahlak Islands (Eritrean Red Sea) and later joined the *Ala* group or PLF2 led by Issayas Afewerki.²¹⁴ These two groups established the EPLF's initial phase with Issayas as its principal figure. Notable individuals like Abu Tiyara from the Obel Group or PLF3 joined them. Abu Tiyara was personally with Hamid Idris Awate's groups during the start of the armed struggle in 1961.²¹⁵

²⁰⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxv

²⁰⁹ Plaut, Understanding Eritrea, p. 114

²¹⁰ Connel, 2001, p. 349

²¹¹ Ibid, 2001, p. 351

²¹² Ibid, 2001, p. 349

²¹³ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 552-553

²¹⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 58-59

²¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 29-30



Freedom fighter Issayas Afewerki explains the newly published political manifesto: *Nihnan Ilamanan* (Our Struggle and Its Goals); the text or words hanging out means Our Struggle and Its Goals in English.²¹⁶

Initially, the text *Nihnan Ilamanan* was written in the Tigrigna language, one of the nine Eritrean languages spoken by most of the Eritrean population.²¹⁷ This political manifesto is the most controversial and applied ideological manual in the Eritrean history of the nation-building journey. It is 24 pages long,²¹⁸ excluding the Glossary. It was written in a simplified way so that anyone who reads Tigrigna can easily understand its message, apart from the historical background written from the author's perspective.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, this manifesto was the cornerstone of the EPLF; it simply shows the nature of the ideological approach of EPLF and the assertive communication through one word: Our;²²⁰ it begins with our struggle and its goals—potent rhetoric. The leaders and the elites of the EPLF never say I, My, Mine,

²¹⁶ Picture taken from the RDC

²¹⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 508

²¹⁸ *Nihnan Ilamanan* document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, November 01, 1971

²²⁰ *Ibid*, November 01, 1971

and To Me as part of their communication discipline. The first and most crucial ideological baptism one has to train is to think collectively and communicate collective interest.

Bitsayinet means thinking collectively or having a common advantage.²²¹



Young Issayas Afewerki, while studying a map before a military operation in the early years of the EPLF.²²²

Thus, the author begins the text with the phrase *our struggle* and continues throughout the text, mirroring the collective interest of the Eritrean citizens, assuming himself speaking on behalf of the Eritrean citizen's interests regardless of their religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and regions.²²³ In this context, he criticises the faults of the ELF in every paragraph by reminding the reader that the ELF was founded on the decentralised and corrupted organisational system that divided the Eritrean freedom fighters by religion, ethnic background, and regions they came from. But we, the EPLF, are not like the ELF, and our struggle strategies and goals for Eritrea and its people are different and better. They are people-centred.²²⁴

In the first page of the text, the author informs the audience that although their ideas came in the form of a brochure and published in written form today, their vision, ideologies, and strategies regarding reforming the Eritrean struggle were explained and distributed orally and

²²¹ Pateman, 1990, pp. 457-472

²²² Picture obtained from RDC.

²²³ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²²⁴ Ibid, November 01, 1971

in short pamphlets to the public way before the publication of the above-presented manifesto.²²⁵ Emphasising financial shortage was one of the main obstacles behind the delayed distribution of the written text to the broader public. From now onwards, time and space are becoming more favourable to the EPLF and continue to remind the reader regarding who the EPLF is and what its ideals are, briefly answering these questions in a generalised form that they are those fighters who divorced from Kiyad El Ama following Adobha meeting in 1969.²²⁶

Analytically, this text identifies two compacted ideological junctions that continued throughout the fourteen years of the liberation struggle from 1977 to 1991 and was reaffirmed during the first organisational congress of the EPLF in 1977.²²⁷ Exactly six years after the publication of this political manifesto. These two arguments are the continuity in adherence to this manifesto's strategic and ideological values and struggle features. The next is the idea of otherness or systematically pushing or putting the ELF in the corner on the side of the others. The others in the history of the Eritrean liberation journey are those who hindered the Eritrean question of self-determination and independence, namely Ethiopia and the imperialist powers associated with the USA.²²⁸ So, ELF, regardless of its contributions as the founder of the Eritrean liberation movement and a mother party who brought the founders of the EPLF and producer of this manifesto up to the stage where they are, is labelled as the primary enemy of the genuine Eritrean liberation struggle.²²⁹

When it comes to continuity, which is reflected through this manifesto, the EPLF elites for the next twenty years, from 1971 to 1991, continued to preach throughout their communication channels religious, ethnic, and regional divisions or trying to make any activities based on or related to these issues to divide the Eritrea people is forbidden religion is private any individual or group initiate such activities is the enemy of the Eritrean people.²³⁰ According to the EPLF political manifesto, the field of Eritrean is and will only accommodate one united political organisation that can work for the independence of Eritrea by uniting all parts of social classes: peasants, students, teachers, doctors, men, and women,

²²⁵ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²²⁶ Ibid, November, 01, 1971

²²⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, xxxvii

²²⁸ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²²⁹ Ibid, November, 01, 1971

²³⁰ Pool, 2001, pp. 161-175

etc. equally united in one common cause.²³¹ That organisation is the EPLF, which highlights that it is always ready to discuss and change reasonable issues in the name of national interest.²³²

Furthermore, the EPLF manifesto emphasises that the enemy (Jebha) is trying to depict them as Christian separatists and, at the same time, replying that they are not Christian prophets but freedom fighters who divorced from the ELF and considered to be malevolent.²³³ They underline that those who trade in the name of Eritrean liberation struggle for their popularity and individual interests. Serving and collaborating with external powers will be categorised with the others, dismissed from the field of Eritrea, and archived on historical shelves.²³⁴ Indeed, when it comes to similarities between Nihnan Ilamanan and the following three primary sources, which are going to be used in the following three chapters each chronologically: the decisions of the first organisational congress of the EPLF, which took place in 1977,²³⁵ the interviews of the Issayas Afewerki in 1986²³⁶ and the Resolutions of the second and unity congress of the EPLF in 1987²³⁷ I found an uninterrupted line of communication, which means there is tangible continuity in how the EPLF addresses its challenges, visions, and strategies, as attached to the first published EPLF Manifesto, *Nihnan Ilamanan*.

Amidst all this ideological, power, and interest-oriented competition between the ELF and EPLF, a civil war occurred between them in 1972.²³⁸ The regionalist ELF did not want to give space for the reformists EPLF and began to attack them to curb their further progress, and as a result of this, the first Eritrean Civil War occurred from 1972 to 1974. The situation went from bad to worse; an armed struggle that began to fight the Ethiopian occupation of Eritrea turned into domestic conflict. Parallel to the war directed against the Ethiopian army, both actors continued to fight against each other for the next two years until 1974,²³⁹ one year after the publication of their political manifesto and creation of the united front of the PLF1

²³¹ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²³² Ibid, November 01, 1971

²³³ Ibid, November 01, 1971

²³⁴ Ibid, November 01, 1971

²³⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxvii

²³⁶ Afewerki, Interview with Issayas Afewerki, Vice-Secretary General of the EPLF, 1986

²³⁷ Second and Unity Congress doc. From RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC.0016 produced March 12-19, 1987

²³⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxvi

²³⁹ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxvi

and PLF2 under the leadership of Issayas Afewerki in 1971,²⁴⁰ the EPLF made tremendous military and organisational advancements to confront the ELF. Following the peace agreement of *Weki Zagir* in 1974, both sides continued to fight against the Ethiopian forces separately on their way while keeping relative peace between them until 1980.²⁴¹

In the meantime, facts on the ground began to testify that the EPLF gradually gained the upper hand in the field. Many Christian and Muslim believers, both genders and from different social statuses, started to join the EPLF.²⁴² Voices about Issayas and the EPLF began to circulate faster. After the terrible civil war, Eritreans abroad and home restarted breathing the air of optimism and hope. Within this context, the EPLF executed its first organisational congress in the liberated Region of Eritrea *Sahel* in 1977.²⁴³ However, the first six years of the EPLF were full of internal and regional challenges and conflict. To begin with, in 1974, a new event happened in Ethiopia, precisely at the end of the Eritrean civil war: Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by his Generals. These generals later developed into a communist regime and became close allies of the USSR.²⁴⁴ The same year, a new revolutionary group in the Ethiopian northern region of Tigray, the TPLF, was formed. TPLF worked closely with EPLF until the *Badme* War in 1998.²⁴⁵ The Ethio-Somalia war on the eastern part of Ethiopia Ogaden began in 1977.²⁴⁶

The ELF initiated the first Eritrean civil war that took place from 1972 to 1974 to suppress the movements of the newly born EPLF.²⁴⁷ Despite both sides' vast human and material losses, the EPLF came out of the war more robust than before. Although there are no clear figures of how many people died, the number of deaths was considerably high, and the war was extremely violent, according to local narrations. Many students from urban areas and individuals from various parts of the country flew to the training fields of the EPLF. After a relatively cooperative and peaceful six years, the second Eritrean civil war began by EPLF when ELF started secret peace talks with the Ethiopian government mediated by the USSR in 1980²⁴⁸ to end the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia; besides, the issue of defence in the

²⁴⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxvi

²⁴¹ Ibid, 2011, xxxviii

²⁴² Pool, 2001, pp. 87-91

²⁴³ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxvii

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 2011, p. xli

²⁴⁶ Tareke, 2002. p. 490

²⁴⁷ Pool, 2001, pp. 70-75

²⁴⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxviii

Sahel strongholds, which the ELF had already withdrawn without informing the EPLF, created massive friction between the two. Thus, EPLF considered this a severe conspiracy that could harm the Eritrean struggle for independence and declared war on ELF, and the second civil war began in 1980.

One of the EPLF's core doctrines, introduced in the analysis of the first EPLF manifesto, was creating a united front for the Eritrean cause.²⁴⁹ Thus, the EPLF did not want to tolerate other political movements in the field of struggle unless and otherwise united into one solid political organisation that could unite the Eritrean people under one mission and that organisation was presented in the manifesto; it is EPLF. That mission was to create an independent Eritrea with complete social freedom that fulfils all citizens' needs and demands regardless of their racial and religious background.²⁵⁰



Members of the EPLF executive committee from 1977 to 1987. Standing from left: Oqbe Abraha, Ali Said Abdella, Sibhat Efrem, Haile Woldetensae, Petros Solomon, Mohammed Said Barih, Mesfin Hagos, and Al-Amin Mohammed Said. Sitting from left: Berhane Gerezgiher, Ibrahim Afa, Romedan Mohammed Nur, Issayas Afewerki (current president of Eritrea), and Mahmoud Ahmed Sherifo.²⁵¹

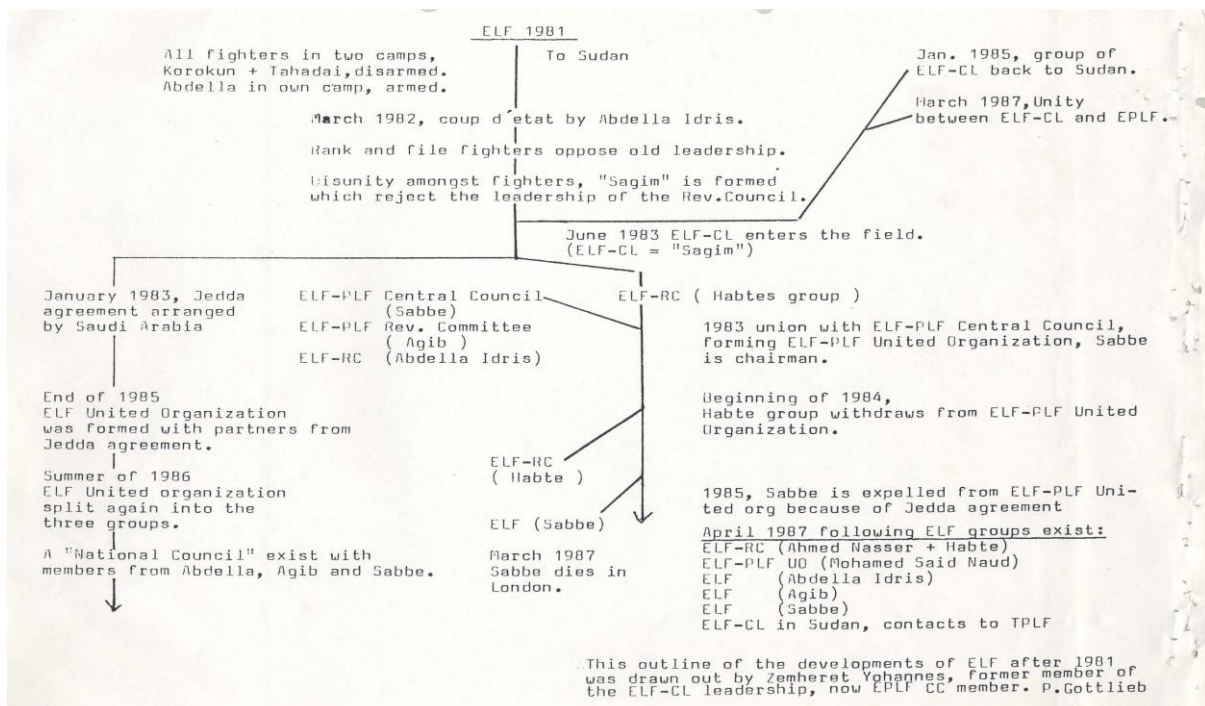
Here, I would like to reconnect this discussion to Cabral's interpretation of the two crucial phases of the theory of the national liberation struggle, which I earlier introduced in chapter one. According to Caporal's definition, the two phases of the national liberation struggle are the national phase, which involves the principal battle for national sovereignty or

²⁴⁹ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²⁵⁰ Ibid, November 01, 1971

²⁵¹ Connell D. T., 2011, 142-144

independence, and the social phase, which is one in which the very question of genuine liberation is posed. Has independence benefited most of the population economically and socially?²⁵² In connection with and based on previous ELF failures, the EPLF, according to its manifesto, was trying to avoid external interference by creating united forces for common goals with a centralised and inclusive liberation movement that engages all parts of the society and ideologically driven movement. However, it seemed that the ELF's secret engagements with external actors made the EPLF decide to go to war with the ELF once and forever.



A sketch that shows the withdrawal of ELF and its successive developments following its defeat by EPLF in 1981 was prepared By Zemheret Yohannes, who was a member of ELF-CL leadership and currently serving as PFDJ Central Committee and head of the Eritrean Research and Documentation Centre (RDC)²⁵³

This time, the EPLF was more prepared logistically and militarily, and it had a strategic relationship with other revolutionary movements in Ethiopia, like the TPLF.²⁵⁴ This strategic approach gave it a plus position and dismissed the ELF from the territory of Eritrea, pushing to Sudan in 1981 after an intense war of two years.²⁵⁵ The tenth anniversary was celebrated, passing all those unmeasurable internal conflicts and two big civil wars and deserting the

²⁵² Ntalaja, 1984, p. 46

²⁵³ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 558

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 503-506

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 2011, xxxviii

almost liberating entire Eritrean territory from the Ethiopian occupation in 1977.²⁵⁶ Except for Asmara and its nearing villages, followed by the strategic retreat in 1978 completely towards Sahel to reorganise and contain the intensified and successive Ethiopian military campaigns fully backed by the USSR's chemical gasses (napalms), they practically tried in Elabered War 1977, mechanised, military advisors and various rages missiles.²⁵⁷

*With almost no outside support, Eritrean nationalists brought successive U.S.- and Soviet-backed Ethiopian governments to their knees. At the same time, they worked to liberate women, workers, and peasant farmers from centuries of grinding poverty, chronic hunger and numbing oppression. It was the blending of a social revolution with political objectives that enabled this uniquely self-reliant liberation front to weld Eritrea's fractious society - half Christian, half Muslim, from nine ethnic groups - into one of modern history's most remarkable fighting forces.*²⁵⁸

Thus, 1982 became another crucial turning point in the history of the Eritrean liberation struggle, particularly for the EPLF. It is known for the most campaigned and hugely invested war of Red Star, the sixth military campaign of the Ethiopian communist regime against EPLF.²⁵⁹ In this war from the Eritrean side, it was the EPLF alone trying to confront the massive Ethiopia military with approximately 85,000 armies accompanied by substantial Soviet military and technical assistance,²⁶⁰ The war was planned to eradicate the EPLF or Wenbediewoch/Wenbedie, which is a common way of calling for the EPLF by Ethiopian communist regime leader Col. Mengistu Hailemariam. Unlike the Ethiopian plan, the war concluded with the EPLF's victory. The casualties were calculated to be about 10,000 deaths from the Ethiopian side and 23,000 wounded.²⁶¹ Despite the vast human and material loss, the EPLF became more robust, demonstrating the organisational and strategic skills of the EPLF as a revolutionary vanguard of Eritrea.

Even though the Ethiopian government continued to launch repeated military campaigns at this stage, the EPLF showed it could withstand any further military attacks from the Ethiopian side and gradually paralysed any internal factions against its struggle strategies. It

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 2011, xxxvii-xxxviii

²⁵⁷ Saba, 1982

²⁵⁸ See the cover page of *Against All Odds* by Dan Connell, published in 1997.

²⁵⁹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxviii

²⁶⁰ Tareke, 2002, p. 478

²⁶¹ Ibid, 2002, p. 488

began to build its state apparatus in the caves of Sahel. Schools,²⁶² hospitals, radio broadcasting,²⁶³ and various organisations such as women and youth associations were established with the flow of displaced citizens from different regions of the countries escaping from Ethiopian oppression to the caves of Sahel to get protection from the EPLF.²⁶⁴ The Sahel became the centre of gravity for the Eritrean liberation movement. The EPLF attracted the attention of the international community. Journalists, scholars, government, and humanitarian agencies began to question who these people were (EPLF), and many interested scholars like Dan Connell²⁶⁵ began to study the EPLF's organisational structure and ideological foundation alongside the nature of the Eritrean liberation struggle.

3.3 Leadership and Organisation Structures of the EPLF

The leadership dynamics and organisational features that shaped the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) route to independence from the Ethiopian occupation and successively became the cornerstone of independent Eritrea were developed and moulded through the challenging twenty years of struggle, having their origin in *Nihnan Ilamanan*, the first EPLF political manifesto published in 1971.²⁶⁶ As explicitly highlighted in its first political manifesto, the Masses or the people are the main protagonists in the EPLF's ideological approach. Way before the publication of its manifesto, the EPLF was working on a mass basis to disseminate its ideology.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, with the gradual increase in daily activities and the magnitude of military and public affairs to directly connect Eritrean society in the liberated and semi-liberated areas with issues in the Sahel or the EPLF central command, *Jemahir* was established (branch of public administration and mass organisations).²⁶⁸

As previously discussed, the EPLF fought against the decentralised organisation strategy and ideology, which required ELF leadership. Hence, it was dedicated to developing a highly centralised political organisation. As part of a centralised system, the hierarchy of formal authority for making essential decisions and investigating public affairs and the relationship

²⁶² Connell D. T., 2011, p. 559

²⁶³ Ibid, 2011, 435

²⁶⁴ Pool, 2001, p. 129

²⁶⁵ See the cover page of *Against All Odds* by Dan Connell, published in 1997.

²⁶⁶ *Nihnan Ilamanan* document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

²⁶⁷ Ibid, November 01, 1971

²⁶⁸ Eritrea M. o., 2016

between the EPLF and the Eritrean society *Jemahir* appeared to be the meeting point as a structure and an actor connecting the freedom fighters and civilian society.²⁶⁹

The EPLF's leadership and political features were structured around a central committee responsible for making strategic decisions and setting the organisation's overall strategic and tactical direction.²⁷⁰ The central committee was composed of representatives from different regions of Eritrea and members of the EPLF's military wing. This diverse and inclusive configuration ensured that the EPLF's leadership strived to represent the people it sought to liberate and that decisions were made with the inputs and perspectives of all regions. Besides, the EPLF has always been cautious regarding issues related to religion. It learned from previous ELF mistakes and officially declared that EPLF is a secular political organisation of freedom fighters. The founders of EPLF proclaimed that in their manifesto, they were not prophets of Christianity but freedom fighters. However, most of them were Christians in the very beginning whom the ELF persecuted due to their ethnic, religious beliefs and ideological differences.²⁷¹

The creation of *Jemahir* was a tangible example that demonstrated the EPLF's multifaceted approach. It was not solely focused on liberating Eritrea from foreign occupation but also profoundly interested in fostering an adequately organised and enlightened society that could contribute evenly to the struggle for liberation. This was in line with Cabral's widely known national liberation struggle theory, which emphasised the need for political and technical skills to mobilise the population. Creating a parallel government in the liberated areas, such as *Jemahir*, was a crucial step in carrying out the social and economic tasks necessary for satisfying the people's aspirations.²⁷² After the demise of the ELF, the EPLF gradually built confidence and control over Eritrea's field. The EPLF began to declare the Sahel a country and the EPLF a government. *Jemahir* appeared to be the first Department of Public Administration and Organisation during the first half of the 1970s.²⁷³

Under the central committee, there were different departments and branches, each responsible for a specific task. The departmental structure allowed the EPLF to operate effectively in distinct areas and contexts, as each department was responsible for adapting its operations to

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 2016

²⁷⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 142-144

²⁷¹ Connell D. T., 2011, 203-210

²⁷² Ntalaja, 1984, pp. 52-53

²⁷³ Eritrea M. o., 2016

the challenges of its area of responsibility under the central command. For example, the military affairs trained and equipped the EPLF's fighters.²⁷⁴ In contrast, political affairs engage with internal and international organisational administrative and diplomatic affairs.²⁷⁵ Regarding the public and administrative matters in Eritrea, it was *Jemahir*'s assignment. Besides this, as part of the political enlightenment and public awareness aimed at creating a well-organised and conscious society in addition to the regular academic revolutionary schools established in the Sahel,²⁷⁶ *Jemahir*, political Cadres, and regular teachers, under the slogan "*Let the learned teach and the unlearned learn*"²⁷⁷ in the liberated and semi-liberated areas, provided regular and broad political, essential health or first aid courses and civic courses.



This is a typical pictorial presentation of how the public seminars and mass organisation activities were executed in an open space under trees with *Jemahir* and political Cadres.²⁷⁸

Regarding the origins of the early EPLF's diplomacy or international relationships, the EPLF established its outreach in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and neighbouring

²⁷⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 80-84

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 2011, pp. 113-115

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 2011, p. 559

²⁷⁷ DOC. from RDC, EPLF / His / Mil / 1 / 03101 / RDC., EPLF developments since mid-1978 up to 1985 enemy offensives

²⁷⁸ Pool, 2001, pp. 105-128

countries through the Eritrean diaspora community living in those countries.²⁷⁹ Indeed, in the diplomatic games, EPLF was strategic. It established a solid attachment with the Eritrea diaspora via its Cadres.²⁸⁰ It has systematically disseminated its ideals and struggle strategies among the Eritrean people in and outside the country. This made the Eritrea people feel an integral part of the struggle and be ready to stand for the Eritrea cause wherever they are. This helped EPLF to produce thousands of diplomats who work and dedicate their time and energy to their nation's interests free of charge.²⁸¹ Eritrean scholars and intellectuals continuously worked to voice Eritrean concerns in various international events besides organise the Eritrean diaspora to continue bringing up the question of self-determination, particularly adhering to the principles of the EPLF as a vanguard of the Eritrea liberation struggle. Successively exploiting this fertile ground, it placed its representative in all the above-listed regions before it became an internationally recognised government in 1991.

One crucial aspect worth remembering when discussing the leadership and organisational structure within the EPLF's political Ideology and nationalism teaching is *Wahyo*.²⁸² *Wahyo* is a Tigrigna (a language spoken by the majority in Eritrea) word that means cell. The meaning and function of *Wahyo* are technically equivalent to those of a cell in a living organism, that is, the essential constituents or the most petite and vital part of the body.

In the process of political and ideological indoctrinations, those who took the primary teaching and became part of the organisation or newly trained and ideologically charged individuals during the early years of the EPLF mass organisation and social enlightenment who hold the least or primary political-ideological position which she/he gradually grow politically through function and meritocracy also primarily associated with spy or covert operations in the Eritrean public mentality was called *Wahyo*.²⁸³ However, *Wahyo* also had a negative connotation from the ELF's perspective. That time, famous ELF artist, songwriter, and today's leading EPLF supporter, honorary Dr Bahar Bereket Mengisteab, had a five-minute song clip on *Wahyo*. He tries to present what the ELF thinks of *Wahyo* in three words, saying *Wahyo* is secretive, creating misinformation and against unity.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 176-177

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 2011, pp. 176-177

²⁸¹ Information E. M., 2014

²⁸² Ruth, 2019, pp. 31-63

²⁸³ Pool, 2001, pp. 109-110

²⁸⁴ Mengisteab, 1975

According to its manifesto of 1971, the EPLF's national liberation struggle strategy stresses self-reliance and uninterrupted public participation and support in all aspects of its movement. In this case, parallel to the military operations on war fronts, economic, public organisation, and social security issues are among the main concerns of the movement in all parts of the country (liberated, semi-liberated, and areas under the Ethiopian occupation). Here, empirical facts show that social security and organisational problems were commonly seen in the semi-liberated regions and those under the Ethiopian occupation. Due to the partial and complete exposure to the Ethiopian security agent, it becomes challenging to synchronise these areas with the Sahel directly. Regarding economic assistance, the EPLF was economically assisted by the local population in its initial years.²⁸⁵ Food and material support from the liberated and semi-liberated areas was mainly transported to the EPLF frontlines and strongholds with camels. Thus, throughout the EPLF struggle up to 1991, *Jemahir* functioned as a pre-independent state institution.²⁸⁶ These were issues related to public affairs, or what they called it politically, *Kifli Hizbi* at that time.



Jemahir and *Hafash wudubat* while exchanging information in the semi-liberated area. ²⁸⁷

Jemahir's political activities were more expansive than those in the liberated areas or the areas under EPLF control. Their hands were too long; they could reach places under the Ethiopian occupations, control and supervise what was happening within the Ethiopian

²⁸⁵ Documents from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

²⁸⁶ Eritrea M. o., 2016

²⁸⁷ The picture was obtained from RDC (Eritrean Research and Documentation Centre)

military and security movements, and solve any disagreements within Eritrean society, from individual to collective.²⁸⁸ The Ethiopian government was not interested in solving conflicts related to land ownership, ethnicity, or religion within the Eritrean society, as a disunited Eritrea would weaken the liberation movement. To resolve this issue, the EPLF secretly scattered its security and administrative apparatus throughout the Eritrean territory, with its central command in Sahel, Jemahir, and its local offices accountable to the Sahel. The third and most invisible branch, Fedayin (sometimes also called *Hafash wudubat* if the agents are from the civilian community), was disseminated within the society under the Ethiopian occupation to gather information and execute the necessary clandestine operation.²⁸⁹

A typical example of Fedayin's operation is the EPLF elite's Commando operation of 18 Minutes at Asmara Ethiopian military air Force Base in 1984.²⁹⁰ In this sophisticated eighteen minutes of military operation, more than thirty military aircraft were destroyed. The operation was realised by an extended period of intelligence and information gathering and trial plans. In this operation, the role of the civilians in the surrounding areas was tremendous. Numerous Eritrean Tegadelti (fighters) and civilians living near Asmara dedicate their time, finances, and some of their lives to realise the operation.²⁹¹ The operation shocked the Ethiopian government about the EPLF's intelligence capacity and how the EPLF invisibly infiltrated the areas under the Ethiopian authority's control. Indeed, it also extraordinarily presented the EPLF's development and capacity to the international community.²⁹² On the other hand, from the organisational point of view, it shows that the Jemahir, Wahiyo, and Fedayin/Hafash Wudubat are three in one and one in three as an integral part of the central command in the Sahel, organising, enlightening, and gathering information while protecting each other and the missions they were given while operating in the semi-liberated and area under the Ethiopian authorities.²⁹³

3.4 Internal Dynamics and Factions

Before discussing the internal conflicts and factions within the EPLF, I will begin the discussion with a short metaphorical phrase taken from General Secretary Issayas Afewerki's

²⁸⁸ Eritrea M. o., 2016

²⁸⁹ Pool, 2001, pp. 105-130

²⁹⁰ Azentawi, 1984

²⁹¹ Ibid, 1984

²⁹² Ibid, 1984

²⁹³ Ibid, 1984

answers during a seminar held in the USA on May 6, 1989.²⁹⁴ The conference was organised by the Eritrean community in the USA. Secretary Issayas and Ali Seid Abdela, who then oversaw the EPLF's foreign relationship, were invited to briefly explain the Sahel or the field of struggle in Eritrea. Eritreans and friends of Eritreans were present at that seminar; among the Eritrean participants was someone who did not support the EPLF. In other words, someone disagreed with the EPLF ideology and struggle strategy.

Among the participants Asked, “Why did the EPLF not invite the different political movements to unite in the field and work together; besides, the EPLF had decided to fight against Zionism and imperialism during its first organisational congress in 1977,²⁹⁵ but today, your approach has been changing. You have already started to discuss how to improve your relationship with the USA and Israel.” Secretary Issayas replied to the first question directly and metaphorically to the second. He began his reply regarding working together in the field with other parties; “Our doors are always open for those who want work, not those who want to philosophise. We are tired of philosophising and will engage only with those who wish to join us on the war front.” However, regarding the seeming ideological change and new diplomatic manoeuvres, he replied metaphorically, “Pretending *to be more Catholic than the Pope is nothing but Self-deception*”.²⁹⁶ His answer can mean that nothing is permanent, especially in politics; ideas, alignments, and friendships can change. However, judging these deeds relatively cannot mean reasonable, and only the driver has the natural feeling and position, depending on the situation, to break, accelerate, and make a U-turn. This metaphorical reply from Issayas is equally interpreted as good and bad from two perspectives. Some say it was a timely answer to the intentions of the individual asking, while others say that Issayas reflected the use of power.

Regarding internal conflicts and factions inside the EPLF, the EPLF, like many other political organisations or liberation movements, was not immune to internal disagreements and competition. However, the conflicts and factions among the EPLF elites differed entirely from those during the ELF era from 1961 to 1969.²⁹⁷ According to Haile Menkerios, who joined the EPLF in 1973 and served his country in different positions following a 2001 political disagreement in Eritrea.²⁹⁸ He left the EPLF and worked as a senior diplomat at the

²⁹⁴ Zantana Imaging, 1989

²⁹⁵ Zantana Imaging, 1989

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 1989

²⁹⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 559-561

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 2011, p. 281

United Nations. Menkerios emphasised that the divisions within the EPLF were not religious, like in the ELF; they were mainly ideological and regional to a minor degree. Haile Menkerios, in his interview dated October 24, 2004.²⁹⁹ Which primarily focused on the PLF leadership crisis of 1973.³⁰⁰ This section first introduces how human resources were allocated in the three divisions that originally divorced from ELF and officially formed the initial phase of EPLF in 1971. The strongest division was PLF1(Shabia), with 150 men; PLF2 (Selfi) had about 120 men, and Obel had about 20-30 men. These groups were not fully integrated and wandered around their separate circles.³⁰¹

Menkerios was surprised to find someone with a regionalist tendency.³⁰² However, since the country still has a feudal approach in areas outside the urban community, people with that attitude are expected to encounter or support people from their region. Ideological disagreement is the worst divisive mentality yet to come, which was a big concern.³⁰³

Menkerios discusses the advantages and disadvantages of criticism and self-criticism, one of the building cornerstones of the EPLF ideological base, which shaped and disciplined not only the EPLF's leadership but also the entire liberation movement and civilian society in the liberated and self-liberated area under the EPLF authority.

The EPLF seriously warns and informs anyone who joins the field of struggle during the training and indoctrination of the newly arriving members that, first and foremost, he or she must dress in the psychological coat of criticism and self-criticism.³⁰⁴ This means all individuals were indoctrinated to thoroughly consider the Revolutionary ideals rather than their interests. They must confess and simultaneously tell what they did, heard, and saw openly to the public in daily meetings with their colleagues to avoid mistrust among the leadership and the fighters. Menkerios explained the conspiracy against the old guards of the EPLF or the new faction, which later took the name Menkae, was identified through criticism and self-criticism.³⁰⁵

At this stage, the ugliest agenda came from those who considered themselves educated fighters and the savers of the revolution and conspired to change old leadership, saying that

²⁹⁹ Menkerios, 2004

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 2004

³⁰¹ Ibid, 2004

³⁰² Menkerios, 2004

³⁰³ Ibid, 2004

³⁰⁴ Pool, 2001, p. 99

³⁰⁵ Menkerios, 2004

they were old-fashioned and trying to attack Solomon by regionalism.³⁰⁶ According to Menkerios, Solomon was the principal actor who called the old leaders Mesafinti (Feudal) and didn't want to hear any news from leadership.³⁰⁷ This movement became the new faction that wanted to introduce scientific socialism by changing the old leadership and its legacy. The goal of this new faction, which later developed into a movement called *Menkae*,³⁰⁸ was a national democratic revolution, socialist in character, to lead to communism. It thought that an overwhelming majority of fighters were on its side. Besides, the young Issayas Afewerki was among these men who were listed to change.³⁰⁹

Anafira Zagra Zeyfelits Ney-Hadanay is an old Eritrean proverb that means he who does not know how a wild Turkey flies is not a good hunter.

Besides the various previously introduced opinions regarding Issayas' military and ideological skills, Menkerios himself, while he was an opponent of Issayas when he was giving his interview, highlighted the personal integrity and charisma of Issayas Afewerki³¹⁰ Who was the principal engineer of the EPLF manifesto was. Interpreting this opinion leads directly to the conclusion that it was impossible to put aside Issayas Afewerki, his cofounder of the early phase of the EPLF, Romedan Mohamed Nur, and their fellow fighter from the Leadership.³¹¹

However, this new movement continued to create divergent points among the newly born EPLF. Besides the ideological divergence, the big mistake the *Menkae*, or the new faction, made was the wrong timing;³¹² The EPLF's three constituent groups, PLF1, PLF2, and Obel, divorced from Kiyad El Ama due to religious and organisational disagreements.³¹³ *Menkae* was again bringing another divisive ideology from inside the EPLF, while the EPLF dealt with the Civil War against the ELF, which extended from 1972 to 1974.³¹⁴ At the same time, both the EPLF and ELF were fighting against the Ethiopian military attacks. For this reason, it was clear that *Menkae* would need more space and opportunity to make changes within the EPLF.

³⁰⁶ Menkerios, 2004

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 2004

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 2004

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 2004

³¹⁰ Menkerios, 2004

³¹¹ Ibid, 2004

³¹² Ibid, 2004

³¹³ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxvi

³¹⁴ Ibid, 2011, xxxvi-xxxvii

According to Haile Menkerios, following these internal ideological confrontations, a new party within the EPLF was formed in 1975.³¹⁵ This sub-party's actions and movements were highly sophisticated, as it was not officially declared. No one knows its spatial and temporal movements and existence. At this point, the EPLF emerged again stronger, absorbing the new factions and reshaping its ideological dimension. By 1979,³¹⁶ According to its military and organisational disciplinary measures, EPLF dismissed any visible internal divisions by taking decisive measures against Menkae. Besides, after two years, in 1981, it completely eradicated the ELF from Eritrean territory, pushing it to Sudan.³¹⁷ Hence, after 1981, there were no tangible empirical facts showing opposition movements inside the Eritrean field of struggle that could confront the EPLF, apart from a minor movement on the border of Sudan and continued diplomatic propaganda and terrorist attacks in western Eritrea bordering Sudan³¹⁸

3.5 Conclusion

Thus, based on their actions of transformations of the physical and social space they employ to achieve their goals, the EPLF is portrayed as a political and revolutionary organisation with a socialist inclination. Notable scholars and researchers depict them as Marxist-Leninist movements with a more affirmative approach towards Maoism.³¹⁹ Indeed, their early ideological thoughts stream from China. While Mao Zedong was alive in 1967,³²⁰ Issayas and Romedan, the EPLF's backbones, were sent to China for special military and ideological training before radically revolutionising the Eritrean liberation movement in 1971, following their disagreements with *Kiyad El Ama* in 1969.³²¹ The EPLF took decisive measures to shuffle the already installed decentralised political and organisational arrangements employed by the ELF.³²² It substituted them with a highly centralised and homogenous organisational apparatus and endeavoured to create a classless society.

The EPLF had learned enough from the conflicts that the ELF experienced and avoided direct foreign influences and interference, unlike the ELF, which was highly influenced by the Arab countries.³²³ In addition, the ELF employed Algerian struggle strategies. In this case, we can

³¹⁵ Menkerios, 2004

³¹⁶ Ibid, 2004

³¹⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxviii

³¹⁸ Connell D. T, 2011, pp. 210-218

³¹⁹ Pool, 2001, pp. 93-94

³²⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 145-146

³²¹ Ibid, 2011, p. 337

³²² Ibid, 2011, pp. 142-144

³²³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 210-218

see that the ELF imported Algerian struggle strategies, mainly known for their decentralised operational division, which did not fit with the Eritrean social, cultural, and political landscape.³²⁴ On the other hand, the EPLF developed an approach that matches the Eritrean societal and cultural landscape. To facilitate this, it created a government or public administration and organisation branches in the liberated areas directly accountable to the central command or the decision-making body in the Sahel.³²⁵ Amilcar Cabral, a national liberation struggle theorist, underlines the importance of creating governments in the areas under the freedom fighters' authority³²⁶ while fighting to liberate one's territory from the enemy.

The EPLF's struggle strategy is people-based. The people are the centre of the whole concept of the Eritrean liberation struggle because they financially support the freedom fighters. Citizens helped *Tegadelti* transport weapons, food, and other materials, providing them with the needed information.³²⁷ In other words, the people became the freedom fighters' genuine and trusted shields in all aspects. As part of this close cooperation, the *Jemahir*, or public affairs, was developed in the early 1970s as an actor. The individuals who worked in that institution and as a collective structure were responsible for the public administration and organisation.³²⁸ *Jemahir* served as a bridge between the military, security, and civilian society, mainly in the liberated and semi-liberated areas. Besides, the *Jemahir* can reach the area under the Ethiopian military occupation via its agents.

Lastly, the EPLF developed a unique binding and communication system based on criticism and self-criticism to create reciprocal trust among the leadership and the freedom fighters or *Tegadelti*.³²⁹ This habit was cultivated as a culture and became habitual with the EPLF movement until 1991, when Eritrea was liberated.³³⁰ This kind of relationship between the freedom fighters and the leadership helped EPLF create affirmative ties and critically identify and curb unwanted factions or ideological hidden conflicts that could negatively affect the national liberation struggle's whole or the big mission.³³¹ This was the primary goal of all the individuals who left their homes and joined the battlefield.

³²⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 559-561

³²⁵ Ibid, 2011, pp. 456-457

³²⁶ Ntalaja, 1984, pp. 52-53

³²⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 105-131

³²⁸ Eritrea M. o., 2016

³²⁹ Menkerios, 2004

³³⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. Xxxix-xl

³³¹ Menkerios, 2004

Chapter - 4

Political Landscape, Regional Dynamics, and the Role of Major Powers

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will study the complicated political landscape of the Horn of Africa, focusing on the Ethiopian, Sudanese, and Somalian political development mainly between 1960 and 1991, identifying issues that directly or indirectly influenced the Eritrean Liberation Struggle and the subsequent engagement with the EPLF's progressive regional roadmap. Following the end of the Second World War,³³² The Horn of Africa became a volatile and vulnerable region with great geostrategic importance. It is characterised by a complex political and historical background, such as colonial legacies, geopolitical realities, and the interests of the global powers, which shaped its political landscape and profoundly impacted the region's political dynamics.³³³

In addition, this chapter will consider issues from the broader regional actors that tangibly influenced the Eritrean liberation movement in this context; I will selectively pick specific contributions of the following countries: Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Libya. Emphasising their views and roles towards the Eritrean question of self-determination. Besides the regional actors' roles, the east-west polarisation from 1948 to 1989,³³⁴ notably the United States and the Soviet Union's competition to secure a strategic position in the Red Sea.³³⁵ Shaped and dramatically transformed the political dynamics of the Horn of Africa.

In return, this phenomenon exposed the region's political, economic, and social structures to endless conflict, and the two superpowers (the USA and USSR) interfered in these countries' domestic and foreign affairs. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of these involvements in domestic and cross-border issues of the regional governments is essential to understanding the political environment through which the EPLF passed and formed the state of Eritrea.

So, before discussing the role of neighbouring, regional, and superpowers in the EPLF's liberation struggle and foreign relationship strategy, I will critically analyse the documents of the agendas and recommendations of the EPLF's first organisational congress, which took

³³² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. Xxxiii-xl

³³³ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 525-531

³³⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 525-531

³³⁵ Ibid, 2011, pp. 525-531

place in 1977 in the liberated region of Eritrea.³³⁶ As a primary source of discussion for this chapter, the text's audience is the international community or the public; its author, the EPLF, was trying to attract the international community's attention and show the organisational and liberation movement's development in military and public diplomacy.

The first EPLF organisational congress

The first EPLF organisational congress was held six years after it published its first political manifesto, *Nihnan Ilamanan*, in 1971.³³⁷ This manifesto was used as a primary source in the previous chapter or chapter three. In these two documents produced by the organisation or EPLF, there is visible continuity in two of the numerous points raised and discussed in the text published at two different moments. One was the EPLF standpoint approach towards imperialism and Zionism within its diplomatic space.³³⁸ The second point of continuity was the relationship between the people of Eritrea and the freedom fighters or *Tegadelti*.³³⁹

EPLF, through these two published documents, underlined that the Eritrean people are the primary driving forces behind the liberation movement, and the freedom fighters are not separate entities. They are part and parcel of the society.³⁴⁰ The relationship between these two bodies must have solid continuity to reach the intended goal, which is an independent Eritrea. In addition, it condemned imperialism and Zionism and emphasised fighting against them continuously in collaboration with other progressive forces in different parts of the globe. In this context, these forces were called revolutionary movements in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Europe.³⁴¹

The first organisational congress was carried out under three main slogans or themes: Through a united struggle to build one, and united front, engaging consistently to develop the social and economic aspects of the liberated area or regions, and to accomplish the revolutionary national democratic mission it crucial to enlighten, organise and arm the masses (*Hafash Yinkah Yiwedeb Yiteatek*) this was widely known during the struggle era as part the public organisation mechanism³⁴² In this congress, the role of civil society was told

³³⁶ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³³⁷ Ibid, November 01, 1971

³³⁸ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³³⁹ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁴⁰ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁴¹ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁴² Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

in detail, and how these corporations between the masses and fighters contributed to the successful military operations against the enemy both morally and economically, which in return resulted in the EPLF and ELF, to seem in relatively peaceful cooperation. However, although they worked together to liberate many cities from the Ethiopian occupation, there was no genuine trust between them. There were clear signals about the second civil war to come. Nevertheless, the heroic accomplishments of the fighters were appreciated during the Congress.³⁴³

Tegadelti, delegations of Eritrean public organisations from inside and outside participated in this congress. Besides, representatives from various countries, mainly representatives of communist and socialist movements, physically participated during this congress in the liberated region of Eritrea, the Sahel. Representatives of the Arab Republic of Syria, the liberation movement of Palestine, the liberation movement of Oman, the Democratic Republic of Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Libya and Iraq from the Arab countries, delegates of the communist party of the Republic of Italy, communist part of France and representatives of the democratic movements in Ethiopia like TPLF were among those who physically participated.³⁴⁴

In this meeting, the resolutions and recommendations focused on three broad areas: the liberation movements' organisational, political, and social aspects. Regarding the movement's organisational features, five resolutions were approved:³⁴⁵ the draft of the National Democratic Programme, the organisation's name, the national constitution's draft, the organisation's flag, *Merih* (vanguard) must be the monthly organisational journal and the election of the central committee. Besides, the political dimension discussed on the quest for national unity, on the diplomatic side raised and condemned the behaviours of the previous foreign mission, which was the ELF foreign affair in the name of the Eritrean people, gathered funds or support and misused it for its interests instead of applying it in the liberation struggle's needs.³⁴⁶ The congress discussed how and on what grounds negotiations and peaceful solutions should be done with the Ethiopian government.³⁴⁷

³⁴³ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁴⁴ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³⁴⁵ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁴⁶ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁴⁷ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

In addition, in the social field, congress discussed marriage issues intensively,³⁴⁸ particularly *Tegadelti* or freedom fighters who were marrying civilians. It approved marriage to be consummated under specific criteria. When individuals apply for it, a special committee studies the situation, and based on the revolutionary regulations, it can be done. Besides, it appreciated the initiative and engagements of the various Eritrean community organisations in Arab countries, Europe, and North America to support the Eritrean struggle, particularly for the EPLF.

Finally, the congress concluded by highlighting the importance of intensive popular support to the liberation movement and the need to focus on the advanced mass organisation to create unity among the freedom fighters and Eritrean people in such a way as to develop a strong connection between the area under the enemy and the liberated area. Furthermore,³⁴⁹ it appreciated the support of friendly countries and like-minded revolutionary movements. It emphasised broadening its connection with other revolutionary movements in different parts of the world. Above all, it reminded the interests of imperialist powers, notably the USA, against the independence of Eritreans from the early 1940s, and they continued to support the government of Ethiopia to crush the Eritrean liberation struggle, in which the EPLF will continue to fight against Zionism and Imperialism.³⁵⁰

Through this meeting, the EPLF, as a vanguard of the Eritrean liberation movement, invited groups and organisations of socialist movements worldwide to participate, emphasising the importance of internationalising a consolidated socialist camp to fight against colonialism and neocolonialism.³⁵¹ Amilcar Cabral, a national liberation struggle theorist, defined neocolonialism as substituting colonialism as the principal form of imperialism as 1960 became a turning point in African colonial history.³⁵² Seeking to prevent the enlargement of the socialist camp, the international bourgeoisie resolved to create new allies in the dependent countries.³⁵³ According to EPLF, in the Horn of Africa, the USA appeared as an imperialist power in the form of neocolonialism, creating an alliance with Ethiopia, which economically depended much on US aid.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁸ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁴⁹ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁵⁰ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³⁵¹ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁵² Ntalaja, 1984, pp. 45-46

³⁵³ Ibid, 1984, pp, 45-46

³⁵⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 525-531

Besides, when it comes to interpreting the concept of the National liberation movement, the EPLF presented its plan in detail during the conference, in which the populations have to be organized to fight against foreign powers to liberate their country, being on the side of Tsegdelti as always and may be more effective than before to curb the intensified Ethiopian repeated campaigns.³⁵⁵ Regarding the social revolution, the EPLF, as a vanguard of the Eritrean liberation struggle, is doing its best to dismantle the capitalistic and abusive structures that exploit the workers, peasants, and women, replace them with socialism and create a classless society. To do this, one of the main slogans of the 1977 congress was *Hafash Yinkah Yiwedeb*, which means the masses must learn, organise, and arm or prepare to fight for their rights.³⁵⁶ According to Amilcar Cabral, National liberation is a revolutionary process involving the complete overthrow of imperialist domination in its colonial and neocolonial forms.³⁵⁷ It implies both a national revolution and a social revolution, which seeks to destroy the capitalist structure on which the exploitation of workers and peasants is built to replace it with socialism.³⁵⁸

4.2 Regional Context and Neighbouring Countries

Before going into the roles and influences of the neighbouring and regional countries in the Eritrean liberation struggle and the quest for self-determination, briefly introducing the Horn of Africa to the reader would be helpful. It is a region in Eastern Africa that constitutes the easternmost extension of the African land. Although the boundaries of the countries in the Horn of Africa are not precisely defined, I will focus on the commonly known or designated area that encompasses Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia for this research purpose.³⁵⁹ These nations share a complex and interconnected history, which has resulted in their cultures being closely linked. However, various definitions of the Horn of Africa exist, ranging from narrower to broader ones that include parts or all of Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda. Additionally, the term "Somali peninsula" is commonly used to refer to

³⁵⁵ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³⁵⁶ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

³⁵⁷ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 46

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 1984, p. 46

³⁵⁹ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, February 27). Horn of Africa. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Horn-of-Africa>

the region's easternmost portion, specifically the territories of Somalia and the Somali region of eastern Ethiopia.³⁶⁰



A world map shows the geographical position of the Horn of Africa region.³⁶¹

The above-listed countries of the Horn have been profoundly shaped by their shared colonial experiences. These countries were mainly colonised by Britain and Italy, except Djibouti, which was a French colony.³⁶² As colonialism has its imprints in the place where it landed, these colonial experiences have left a lasting impact on the region's political, economic, and organisational development and culture, language, and religious practices. However, historical and archaeological research repeatedly asserted that the horn of Africa is the origin of mankind and the first and only scientifically verified route where the first modern humans crossed from Africa to the rest of the world.³⁶³ Thus, these societies existed way before the arrival of the European imperialists in the 19th century, and they have rich cultural and historical identities.³⁶⁴ The majority of the population of these countries have the same ethnic background, mainly in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Sudan.

The following examples easily show how deeply interconnected the region's population is regardless of the repeatedly coming and going ethnic, religious and border conflicts, which mainly have their origin in colonialism. *Tigrigna* is the biggest ethnic group and language in

³⁶⁰ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, February 27). Horn of Africa. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Horn-of-Africa>

³⁶¹ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, April 7). *Horn of Africa*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Horn-of-Africa>

³⁶² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 321-327, 181-182, 474-476

³⁶³ Beth Blaxland, 2020

³⁶⁴ De Waal, 2009, pp. 99-113

Eritrea and borders the same ethnic group from Ethiopia in southern Eritrea. Similarly,³⁶⁵ other ethnic groups like *Saho*, *Kunama* and *Afar* from Eritrea share identical belongings with the same ethnic groups from Ethiopia and Djibouti.³⁶⁶ On the other hand, the *Beni Amir* and *Hadendewa/Hidareb* from Eritrea and Sudan share the same cultural, linguistic, and historical values³⁶⁷. Besides, the Somali people live in both countries Ethiopia and Somalia.³⁶⁸ At the same time, the *Benishangul-Gumuz* from western Ethiopia shares the same values as people from Sudan and South Sudan.³⁶⁹ Hence, these are selected examples of similarity to the minimum among the region's population. Otherwise, one can conclude that it is difficult to separate these societies as they are deeply historically and culturally interconnected.

Regarding the regional context, due to its strategic location in the Red Sea, Eritrea has a long historical connection with countries from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Far East through trade and cultural exchanges. However, for this research purpose, I will only focus on the countries that had closer influence during the Eritrean liberation struggle: Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.³⁷⁰ Historical records prove that Eritrea was the first gate to Islam in Africa during the early years of Prophet Mohammed;³⁷¹ thus, due to this and subsequent trade connections, the territory of today's Eritrea had a deep relationship with Arab countries. In addition to this, Eritrea is also home to almost half Christians and half Muslims.³⁷² Due to these historical connections, when Eritrean people, following the end of the Second World War, rejected their independence while many other nations under European colonisation were liberated, the above-listed Arab countries were among the first countries to stand on the side of the Eritrean people and assist the early liberation movement economically and morally.³⁷³

On the other hand, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, a self-declared exalted King of Kings and Lion of Judah, had convinced the USA-led West European nations and most of the international community that Eritrea was part of Ethiopia and those Eritreans who were claiming independence were Muslim terrorists (Shiftas) minorities.³⁷⁴ The Emperor recruited

³⁶⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 43-47

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 2011, pp. 43-47, 457-458

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 2011, pp. 116-123

³⁶⁸ Markakis, 1996, pp. 567-570

³⁶⁹ Young, 1999, pp. 321-346

³⁷⁰ Weldemichael, 2013, pp. 873-885

³⁷¹ Mukhtar, 2008

³⁷² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 447

³⁷³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 73-75

³⁷⁴ UN, 1996, p. 73

a few Eritreans from the Christian highlanders with a unionist political agenda to implement this.³⁷⁵ Those Eritreans who believed in union with Ethiopia on his side. So, the above regional and neighbouring countries' alignment position clearly shows how politically and ideologically these nations saw Eritrea's quest for independence.

Given the fact that most of the members of the beginners of the early armed struggle in Eritrea were Muslim lowlanders, and they were closely tied to the Arab countries to get financial support,³⁷⁶ Ethiopia exploited this. It worked diplomatically to convince the Western countries, which the USA was on the Ethiopian side,³⁷⁷ for an evident reason to secure its position in the Red Sea. Simultaneously, the establishment of the State of Israel in the Middle East in 1948 and the beginning of the broader Arab and Israel conflict,³⁷⁸ Ethiopia and the USA were close allies of Israel, while on the other hand, the USSR was behind the revolutionary movement in the Arab countries.³⁷⁹ This well-woven mosaic of complications briefly presents the regional context of the early years of the Eritrean liberation movement.

The EPLF, during its first organisational congress that was held in 1977, condemned the interference of the government of the USA in the sovereign territory of Eritrean which began in the early 1940s in the name of regional security which abused the rights of the Eritrean people,³⁸⁰ this event can be proved by the USA's establishment of the Kagnaw Army radio station in 1943. This station was created by taking over a pre-existing Italian naval radio station, Radio Marina, following the surrender of Italians to the Allied forces in 1941.³⁸¹ The project was initiated through the US government's promise to the Ethiopian Emperor to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia after the termination of the temporary British administration (1941-1952).³⁸² The US-Ethiopia partnership that facilitated this initiative is readable in President Truman's letter to Emperor Haile Selassie, addressed on July 11th, 1946.³⁸³ The above letter promises the United States' concrete support for Ethiopia's demands using every available means. Hence, during the 1977 conference, the EPLF reaffirmed that the US

³⁷⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 249

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 2011, pp. 210-213

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 2011, p. 319

³⁷⁸ Fletcher-Cooke, 1973, pp. 612-629

³⁷⁹ Forsythe, 1971, pp. 132-142

³⁸⁰ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³⁸¹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 331-332

³⁸² Connell D. T., 2011, p. 135

³⁸³ Truman, 1946

government continues its hostile policies against the Eritrean people, and the Eritrean people, through the vanguard of the EPLF, will continue to fight against these policies.³⁸⁴

The regional tension in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa directly resulted from the competition between the USA and the USSR. From 1952 to 1969, these two superpowers ideologically divided the entire region, leading to complex problems, including ethnic, religious and resource management issues. The USA developed solid diplomatic ties and cooperation with Israel and Ethiopia, establishing one of the largest US Marines bases in Asmara with a Military personnel count of more than 3200, following the installation of Eritrean and Ethiopian federation in 1952 as promised by Emperor Haile Selassie earlier.³⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the USSR stood on the side of the revolutionary groups and pro-soviet governments, who came to power almost all through coup d'etat, such as Egypt (1952), Iraq (1958), Syria (1966), Somalia (1969), Sudan (1969), Ethiopia (1974), and Southern Yemen (1978).³⁸⁶ These actions further exacerbated the regional polarization and contributed to the region's emergence of complex political, social, and economic challenges, directly influencing the Eritrean liberation struggle.

4.3 Geopolitical Factors and Power Structures

Numerous geopolitical features and power structures affected the Eritrean liberation struggle, which lasted over three decades, from 1961 to 1991.³⁸⁷ Some of the broadly known Geopolitical factors that influenced the Eritrean liberation struggle and the Horn of Africa were the internal conflict in Eritrea related to religious and ethnic problems mainly implanted by the Temporary British Administration where these issues survived until the end of the ELF era in 1981,³⁸⁸ the birth of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent Arab-Israel war and within this context, the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the region,³⁸⁹ the UN decision to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia and the following annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962,³⁹⁰ The USA and USSR were involved in the area as part of the Cold War polarisation to support various factions directly and indirectly. There is also the issue of Nile water, or what is

³⁸⁴ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³⁸⁵ Schwab, 1978, pp. 11-14

³⁸⁶ David, 1986, p. 3

³⁸⁷ Bernal, 2004, p. 9

³⁸⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 135-138

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 2011, p. 319

³⁹⁰ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxv

politically called hydro-politics. Ethiopia is the primary source of the Blue Nile, which produces about 86% of the Nile water in Sudan and Egypt.³⁹¹

The power structures that influenced the Eritrean liberation movements streamed mainly from six positions, with varying degrees of influence, with some supporting it and others trying to curb it directly or indirectly. These structures are the USA-Bloc, the USSR-Bloc, and the OAU, mainly manipulated by Emperor Haile Selassie and his friends as the organisation's founder alongside other African leaders.³⁹² The Arab League, with its central Actor Egypt, which is in interest conflict with Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government,³⁹³ In addition to these structures and geopolitical factors, Somalia and Sudan's role was not as part of the Arab League but as neighbouring and friendly countries to Eritrea, which had a lasting impact during the ELF and EPLF eras.³⁹⁴

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter in the documents of the EPLF's first organisational congress, the EPLF leaders highlighted and commented on these power structures and actors trying to influence the Eritrean liberation struggle. Some are friends of Eritrea and try to help the Eritrean people gain their independence, mainly the Arab League in general and the previously listed Arab countries. In this case, Egypt helped the liberation movements from the beginning and was continuously appreciated by Eritrea.³⁹⁵ However, political scientists continuously interpreted Egyptian political manoeuvres as being done in its interest due to the Nile River disputes with Ethiopia as a proxy war.³⁹⁶

During this meeting, the EPLF openly presented how these Geopolitical factors were created By the leading actors from the EPLF's perspective; these leading actors are the Imperialist forces represented by the USA.³⁹⁷ According to the EPLF, these factors were invented or created soon following the end of the Second World War as an instrument to monopolise and jeopardise the region, and Eritrea, at the centre of this region on the Red Sea shore, became the victim of the USA foreign policy.³⁹⁸ Simultaneously, here comes the Issue of the birth of the state of Israel, which is against the prominent supporters of the Eritrean liberation

³⁹¹ Daniel, 199, pp. 141-169

³⁹² Weldemichael, 2013, pp. 872-889

³⁹³ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 74-75

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 74-75, 486-488

³⁹⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 192-193

³⁹⁶ Ibid, 2011, p. 192

³⁹⁷ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

³⁹⁸ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

movement; these are the Arab countries, and the EPLF strongly condemned Zionism and Imperialism in its recommendations and resolutions passed during this meeting.³⁹⁹

The involvement of superpowers (the United States and Russia) has negatively influenced the region's geopolitical landscape. The border disputes between Somalia and Ethiopia began when Somalia invaded the Ogaden region; in this war, the USSR condemned Somalian actions against Ethiopia. The Nile Water issue between Egypt and Ethiopia has contributed to the dimension of the conflict among these countries following the decolonisation era.⁴⁰⁰ The birth of the state of Israel and its wars against neighbouring Arab countries, along with Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia's opposition to Islamic expansion and anti-Islam actions and closely working with Israel to control the Eritrean liberation struggle,⁴⁰¹ they have further complicated the region. The two superpowers, as immense structures and leading actors inventing and managing conflict and being the primary source of economic subsidisation to the area through their aid projects, have completely positioned the entire region into different corners of tensions.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), navigating through this complicated geopolitical atmosphere and power structure designation dominated the region, put forth a series of transformative proposals to completely reshape the Eritrean field of struggle in areas that will interest civilians and the military during its first organisational congress.⁴⁰² These included the military situation on the fronts, organisational features, public diplomacy, and citizen participation in the battle. At this stage, the EPLF was not the only political organisation in Eritrean. There was the gradually decaying ELF on the other side. However, ideas and news about Afewerki and his colleagues were disseminated widely nationwide.⁴⁰³ This sparks curiosity and interest among Eritreans about this new young man trying to take over the ELF and reform the Eritrean liberation struggle strategy.

However, the situation was not easy for the EPLF to shine, although it registered numerous military victories, nearly liberating the entire nation from the Ethiopian occupation by 1977, which was concluded by the strategic retreat in 1978⁴⁰⁴ due to the massive Russian and

³⁹⁹ Ibid, January 23-31, 1977

⁴⁰⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 192-193

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 2011, p. 319

⁴⁰² Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

⁴⁰³ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 313-314

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, 2011 pp. xxxvii-xxxviii

Cuban military and the technical and economic support given to the Ethiopian government. Nevertheless, EPLF appeared among the regional actors when it eradicated the ELF from the Eritrean field to Sudan and dismissed the military attack by Ethiopia in 1982, known as the Red Star campaign. Ethiopia deployed ten divisions along three fronts of the Sahel. These divisions consisted of 84,537 combatants, 55 aircraft, 131 tanks, 162 armoured cars, 102 infantry vehicles, 499 field artillery, 48 rocket launchers, 873 mortars, 691 antiaircraft guns (used against hillside redoubts), 1,349 antitank guns and 7,714 heavy machine guns.⁴⁰⁵ During this campaign, Col. Mengistu spoke to his nation: He would eliminate the EPLF/Wenbedie once and forever. However, the facts on the ground went the opposite.

In 1977, the Cubans, Russians and East Germans and the one who was a friend of the Eritrean liberation movement, Col. Muammar Muhammad al-Gaddafi of Libya, aligned with Col. Mengistu of Ethiopia. During his visit to Ethiopia, Al-Gaddafi reiterated that his country would continue to support Ethiopia in its war against its enemies (imperialist forces).⁴⁰⁶ Amidst all these challenges, the Eritrean freedom fighters in the caves of Sahel were reassessing how to confront these unpredictable and difficult political-military developments.



In 1977, Mengistu Haile Mariam smashed bottles of red dye to represent the blood of imperialists and counter-revolutionaries in Meskal Square, launching the Red Terror⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Tareke, 2002, p. 488

⁴⁰⁶ Ogunbadejo, 1983, p. 176

⁴⁰⁷ Tiba, 2022

Following the defeat of the Ethiopian army during the Red Star military campaign of 1982 and the demise of the ELF, the Global attention diverted towards EPLF. Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia became aware that it would be impossible to defeat EPLF by force; according to Ashagre Yigletu, PhD, who was the Ethiopian deputy prime minister during that era, speaking in his interview with exiled Ethiopian ESAT TV Broadcasting, the Ethiopian government since 1984 began hidden negotiations with EPLF.⁴⁰⁸ Yigletu says that he was the one Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam had assigned to lead all the hidden meetings and later official peace talks in 1989 in the USA and Nairobi with representatives of the EPLF. He said they met in places such as Greece, Rome, and some East European countries.⁴⁰⁹

Through these victories and steadfastness, the EPLF leaders brought a concise message that resonated with the Eritrean people. They believed and declared the struggle belonged to the people and that those who led the battle must be among their population through their first political manifesto in 1971.⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, they emphasised the importance of inclusivity, pluralism, and absolute secularism in the struggle.⁴¹¹ This message was particularly significant, reflecting a departure from the previous ELF Leadership, which was entirely determined to Islamise the Eritrean liberation struggle.⁴¹² The EPLF's emphasis on participatory and secularism marked a turning point in Eritrea's political landscape from its early years. It paved the way for a more inclusive (where men and women equally fought for their cause)⁴¹³ and democratic system within the liberation movement.

Willing to Learn about the significant role of organisational structures and leadership in the success of liberation movements was central to the EPLF's struggle philosophy. It highlighted the importance of adapting to change and reform in dynamic and challenging situations.⁴¹⁴ In this context, they established their political organ in the liberated areas of Eritrea. They began to organise, teach, and establish means of economic income to sustain themselves and the civilian under their authority.⁴¹⁵ According to Cabral's definition theory of national liberation

⁴⁰⁸ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part II, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, January, 2019

⁴¹⁰ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

⁴¹¹ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

⁴¹² Ibid, November 01, 1971

⁴¹³ Ibid, November 01, 1971

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, November 01, 1971

⁴¹⁵ Pool, 2001, pp. 105-131

struggle, several factors, such as historical, social, economic, and political contexts, contribute to the success of revolutionary movements.⁴¹⁶ Cabral emphasises that the liberation struggle, in addition to the widely known goal of achieving political independence, is also about transforming social and economic structures to create a more equitable society during and after the liberation struggle⁴¹⁷ for a revolutionary movement of national liberation struggle.

The success of a revolutionary movement is often attributed to its leaders' ability to mobilise and coordinate resources and activities effectively.⁴¹⁸ Creating and sustaining a fruitful organisational structure that can withstand the unpredictable nature of revolution is also crucial. In this context, to show how the EPLF was prepared to curb unpredictable revolutions, one can consider the conspiracy by the *Menkae* in 1973, as clearly defined in chapter three. When *Menkae* tried to create divisions within the EPLF, unlike the previously easily created divisions within the ELF, the EPLF dismissed *Menkae* systematically. Leaders must adapt to changing circumstances and reform their strategies to remain effective. Cabral's theory of national liberation struggle provides valuable insights into the factors contributing to revolutionary movements' success. The historical context, including past struggles for liberation, provides the foundation for current movements.⁴¹⁹ Social and economic factors, such as inequality and poverty, create the conditions for revolutionary movements to gain traction. Similarly, political factors like authoritarian regimes or colonialism can catalyse liberation movements' bond.

4.4 The Superpower's Influence and Regional Actors

During the second half of the 20th century, following the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the decolonisation process throughout Africa, the emergence of the Cold War era in 1948 between the USA and the USSR.⁴²⁰ And the birth of the State of Israel in the Middle East in 1948.⁴²¹ The Horn of Africa and the Middle East became the centre of confrontation and battlefield for the superpowers and local actors. Eritrea was previously an Italian colony due to the Italians' defeat in the Second World War It found itself in the middle

⁴¹⁶ Ntalaja, 1984, pp. 50-51

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 1984, pp. 46-47

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 1984, pp. 49-52

⁴¹⁹ Ntalaja, 1984, pp. 44-48

⁴²⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 521-522

⁴²¹ Fletcher-Cooke, 1973

of these global and regional actors roaring to slice it and became a helpless victim.⁴²² It was within this context the USA and Ethiopian unwelcoming approach towards Eritrea to be an independent state started and became the cause for the more than thirty years of bloody wars between Eritrea and Ethiopia, simultaneously the Alpha of all the hostile diplomacy between Eritrean and USA for last eighty years.

The two competing global superpowers of the Cold Era, the United States and the Soviet Union⁴²³, in the same part, created conflicting spots and, on the other hand, worsened the conflicts derived from the colonial era. These issues can be border, ethnic, religious, and economic issues. Secondly, they managed and manipulated these conflicts and disputes, supporting various regional actors or factions involved in these conflicts throughout the Horn of Africa and the Middle East⁴²⁴ As an excuse to legitimise their presence in the region as peace ambassadors or engage in various development projects, their primary goal was to dominate the volatile and strategic Red Sea route, which is a global strategic route connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean trade lines.⁴²⁵

During the early decolonisation stage, the USSR provided the Somalian Government with considerable economic and technical support.⁴²⁶ Besides, it maintained excellent relationships with Egypt, Sudan, and Syria. On the other hand, the USA secured a strong diplomatic tie with Ethiopia and the newly born state of Israel. Israel was highly involved in cooperation with Ethiopia, fearing that the Pan-Arabism would expand to Eritrea, and in 1965, began to train and arm Ethiopian security to crush the Eritrean liberation movement⁴²⁷. In the early 1950s, as part of these superpowers' competition to dominate the Red Sea, the USA got the upper hand by signing a 25-year lease agreement with the Ethiopian government over Kagnew Station in Asmara, Eritrea, in 1953.⁴²⁸ Kagnew Radio Station, with its nearly US military personnel,⁴²⁹ gave the USA an excellent position to control the entire Middle East and Red Sea communication space, with its centre Asmara in the Highlands of Eritrea, about 2325 meters above sea level.⁴³⁰

⁴²² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 321-326

⁴²³ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, April 8). *Cold War*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War>

⁴²⁴ Ibid

⁴²⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 439-440

⁴²⁶ Desfosses, 1987, p. 7

⁴²⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, p.319

⁴²⁸ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxv

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 2011, pp. 331-332

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 2011, pp. 95-99

The EPLF, during its first organisational congress in 1977,⁴³¹ reminded this historical event by the imperialist USA and its client or local agent state of Ethiopia, which both rejected the colonial rules or agreements signed between the Italian government and King Menelik of Ethiopia,⁴³² in which these colonial rules applied to colonised African countries and allowed them to be decolonised and become independent states. However, regarding the Eritrean case, the newly born UN,⁴³³ dominated by the USA and its allies at that time to fulfil the US interests in the Red Sea and the demands of sea access to landlocked Ethiopia, federated Eritrea with Ethiopia. Thus, the EPLF, during its first organisational congress, continued to condemn and reject these Imperialist deeds against the Eritrean people. Besides, it highlighted that it would continue to fight not only against Ethiopian expansionist agendas but against the USA's abusive foreign policies.⁴³⁴

However, the superpowers' and regional actors' relationships and engagements were not always rectilinear or continuous. They varied and changed depending on new developments and changes in interest. For example, the USSR initially had an excellent relationship with Somalia. Still, it later changed its alignment with Ethiopia following the Somalian invasion of Ogaden, standing with the communist leader in Ethiopia.⁴³⁵ The same happened when a new communist regime came to Ethiopia in 1974,⁴³⁶ which gradually cancelled all the US-Ethiopian agreements of 1953 in 1977 and sent out all American personnel from Kagnaw.⁴³⁷ The US government annulled all its assistance to Ethiopia and kept a stance from Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia. Similarly, the US relationship with Anwar Sadat went better than with his predecessor in Egypt.⁴³⁸

Thus, these alignment changes among the Global powers and local actors directly influence the enemies and friends of the Eritrean liberation movements. To begin with, in the Somalia case, although the Somalian people and authorities' view towards the Eritrean people have never changed, which means the Somalians were the first African brothers to stand on the Eritrean side from the very beginning of the liberation movement and continued throughout

⁴³¹ Ibid, 2011, xxxvii

⁴³² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 518-819

⁴³³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 521-522

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 2011, p. 522

⁴³⁵ Jackson, 2010, pp. 26-38

⁴³⁶ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 525-527

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 2011, p. 527

⁴³⁸ Karawan, 1994, pp. 250-260

the thirty-one years of liberation struggle morally and technically,⁴³⁹ In many cases, the Somalian authorities allowed any Eritrean to use a Somalian Passport, which facilitated the usual movement challenges while travelling abroad for various purposes. As a result of this enormous brotherly approach from the Somalian authority towards the Eritrean people, the people-to-people relationship between these nations is evident. Within this context, both the EPLF and ELF elites used Somalian passports.⁴⁴⁰

However, political developments in Somalia became complex in late 1970, mainly due to the border conflict with Ethiopia. The region experienced the ugly features of the war between the two nations in this conflict and a radical change in the almost seventeen-year-old relationship between the USSR and Somalian governments. Following the Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia in 1977, the USSR changed its alignment with the Communist Regime in Ethiopia. Simultaneously, the USA lost its long-existing relationship with Ethiopia, and Russia took a turn in the Horn of Africa with full-scale support to Ethiopian and Leonid Brezhnev of Russia officially stood on the side of Ethiopian to crush the Somalians attack and the Eritrean liberation movement.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) faced significant challenges in establishing itself as a legitimate governing organisation in the early 1970s. The EPLF's primary concerns included the physical location of the political bureau and the potential for the Eritrean liberation movement to be influenced by Arabism or Islamisation, mainly due to the Jebha (ELF)'s weakness or exposure to complete external dependency.⁴⁴¹ To address these concerns, the EPLF developed a concept that declared the Sahel as a country and the EPLF as its government. This proclamation allowed the EPLF to establish a state's basic apparatus, including essential infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, vocational training programs, radio broadcasts (Dimtsi Hafash),⁴⁴² Vanguard journal (Merih), cultural centres, and various social associations including youth, women, and labour organisations in the liberated areas, which are part of the public administration and organisation parallel to the activities of the military wing.

The EPLF's efforts to establish a functioning political organisation were notable, given the challenging circumstances, including ongoing conflict with Ethiopia. By building a

⁴³⁹ Weldemichael A. T, 2013, p. 879

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 2013, p. 879

⁴⁴¹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 318

⁴⁴² Tesfamichael, 2021

foundation for a state despite these challenges, the EPLF demonstrated its commitment to establishing a legitimate government in Eritrea. These pragmatic actions by the EPLF attracted the attention of the Eritrean population and interested foreign agencies (EU, aid, and humanitarian agencies),⁴⁴³ And individual researchers Like Dan Connell.⁴⁴⁴ Who was physically drawn into the caves of Sahel and became part of the struggle to accomplish detailed, real-time studies regarding the Eritrean liberation movement.

Civilians from the areas occupied by the Ethiopian government began to flow towards the Sahel, which became a refuge for Eritreans from Ethiopian persecution. The Sahel became the centre of gravity for the Eritrean struggle, unlike the ELF, which was its political organ established in the diaspora in Arab countries.⁴⁴⁵ The international perception of the Eritrean liberation struggle gradually changed.⁴⁴⁶ Eritrean refugees from Sudan, other neighbouring countries, Europe, and the USA began to join the field of battle through Sudan. Professional doctors and individuals from various levels of society joined the secular movement. Women became the engine of the battlefield and the Eritrean communities in the diaspora to raise awareness concerning the Eritrean legitimate right to self-determination and essential material and financial support.⁴⁴⁷

*According to the EPLF, Eritrea would not be like any typical African country. Not to Africa's sordid and brutal past did Eritrea belong, for it did not come from that seed; its genealogy was different. Its toughened roots were embedded in the mountains of Sahel in the northern part of the country, where the EPLF developed its social and ideological programme - a veritable boot camp utopia - and in the very moral fibre of the Eritrean people.*⁴⁴⁸

The birth of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) as a political organ in the Eritrean liberation struggle was a pivotal development in the history of the Horn of Africa. The EPLF's birth coincided with several significant events in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, which had far-reaching implications for the Eritrean liberation struggle and profoundly impacted the region's political and military landscape. One critical event that had indirect implications for the Eritrean liberation struggle was the Six-Day War in 1967.⁴⁴⁹ This

⁴⁴³ Afewerki, 1986

⁴⁴⁴ Connell, 1993 pp. 1-8

⁴⁴⁵ Pool, 2001, pp. 129-131

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 2001, pp. 129-131

⁴⁴⁷ Pool, 2001, pp. 129-131

⁴⁴⁸ Reid, 2005, p. 471

⁴⁴⁹ Karawan, 1994, p. 260

conflict fought between Israel and a coalition of Arab states, altered the power balance in the Middle East and demonstrated Israel's military skills and determination. While not directly related to the Eritrean struggle, the Six-Day War brought a radical change in the diplomatic and military aspects of the Middle East, shaking the Arab countries that supported ELF (the political mother of EPLF). Similarly, the EPLF, when it divorced from ELF and published its first political manifesto in 1971,⁴⁵⁰ declared to fight against Zionism and Imperialism, mainly due to the intimate relationship between the USA, Ethiopia, and Israel.

In addition, the emergence of Marxist-Leninist governments in Yemen and Sudan also had significant implications for the Eritrean liberation struggle. The People's Republic of Yemen became the Marxist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, known as South Yemen. It initially gave refuge to the Aden group when they escaped from ELF and later returned to Eritrea.⁴⁵¹ The Aden (Dankalia) group cofounded the EPLF with the Ala group in 1971.⁴⁵² Unfortunately, It became an excellent ally to the USSR and Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia.⁴⁵³ Hence, Yemen and Colonel Muammar Muhammad Gaddafi of Libya expressed their support to the Ethiopian communist regime in 1977.⁴⁵⁴ However, the Socialist leader Gaafar Nimeiry, who led Sudan from 1969 to 1985, never changed his approach to the Eritrean liberation struggle regardless of ideological alignment, except for a short time in 1972 due to the agreement between Haile-Selassie and Sudan to bring peace between South and North Sudan.⁴⁵⁵

Sudan accommodated a considerable number of Eritrean refugees and was like a second home for both ELF and EPLF and the Eritrean people. Most support and aid from external providers to EPLF were passed through the Sudanese Sea ports and airports. Hence, despite political and ideological changes, Sudan has always provided smooth and free access to Eritrean liberation movements and Eritrean refugees' needs. Besides, the South Sudanese liberation movements were born during the Nimeiri era in Sudan. As previously introduced, Nimeiri ruled Sudan from 1969 to 1985.⁴⁵⁶ Christians mainly inhabit South Sudan, and as broadly understood, one of the main reasons behind the Sudanese civil war is religion. This

⁴⁵⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 208

⁴⁵¹ Pool, 2001, p. 66

⁴⁵² Ibid, 2001, pp. 67-68

⁴⁵³ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 553

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 348-349

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, 2011, pp. 486-487

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, 2011, pp. 486-487

means that North Sudan is Muslim-dominated, and South Sudan is Christian.⁴⁵⁷ Within this historical background, the Nimeiri government's Muslim Brotherhood politicians were unwilling to keep the 1972 Addis Ababa peace accord to stabilise the Sudanese issue.⁴⁵⁸

Consequently, on 31 July 1983, the Dinka rebel leader John Garang de Mabior founded the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).⁴⁵⁹ The Ethiopian Communist Regime supported the SPLA as a counter-response to Sudan's support of the Eritrean liberation movement.⁴⁶⁰ This further consolidated the relationship between the Sudanese government and the EPLF. At the same time, following the Yom Kippur War of 1973,⁴⁶¹ Israel appeared as a dominant actor in the Middle East, winning over the Ba'athist leaders (Arab socialist leaders) states. These states were prominent supporters of the Eritrean liberation movement before the EPLF appeared as a leading actor in the Eritrean field of struggle. According to the outcomes of the EPLF's first organisational congress of 1977, the EPLF officially announced its principles and positions against Zionism and Imperialism.⁴⁶² Thus, because of these regional and global power changes, continuous alliance changes, and the magnitude of the energy they emit as an outcome of the encounters, the EPLF's diplomatic and struggle strategy was kicked back and forth several times until it consolidated a well-anchored position in the early 1980s.

4.5 Conclusion

Therefore, EPLF seized the opportunities presented by regional and international developments and the prevailing conditions in Ethiopia to orchestrate a series of strategic struggle mechanisms inside Ethiopia. These plans of fighting the Ethiopian government from the inside were aimed to ignite democratic and human rights issues within Ethiopia, mobilise revolutionary movements nationwide, and create alliances with those movements.⁴⁶³ As the EPLF was an experienced and well-organized movement compared to these movements in Ethiopia, it began to extend its assistance to those groups, such as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).⁴⁶⁴ These strategic developments by EPLF, which were unexpected for many, challenged the Ethiopian government and forced it to engage in peace talks. It

⁴⁵⁷ Ronen, 2005, pp. 80-96

⁴⁵⁸ Baarsen, 2000, p. 22

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, 2000, p. 22

⁴⁶⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 487

⁴⁶¹ Handel, 1977, pp. 461-480

⁴⁶² Pool, 2001, p. 68

⁴⁶³ Weldemichael A., 2013, p. 869

⁴⁶⁴ Group, 2010, p. 19

started to organise secret peace talks with EPLF through friendly countries.⁴⁶⁵ Despite these efforts, finding a solution to the conflict remained challenging through the hidden discussions. In the late 1980s, the two parties began official peace talks led by US President Jimmy Carter in the USA, Kenya, and London.⁴⁶⁶

However, the gradually weakening Ethiopian government due to three main points: The EPLF became more muscular, mainly after it wholly eradicated the ELF in 1981 from the Eritrean field of struggle and the victory it gained over Ethiopia during the Red Star War, the appearance of more united and organised revolutionary movements inside Ethiopia under the umbrella of Pan-Ethiopianism in cooperation with the EPLF and the reduction of military support from the USSR mainly because of the *perestroika and glasnost* (a political reform movement within the Communist Soviet Union, which demands openness and reform within the Russian domestic and foreign politics).⁴⁶⁷ That limited the Russian leaders to making worthless investments in military assistance, mainly in things that were not immediately important to Russian national interest. All these issues made visible the decline of the Communist regime in Ethiopia, and the EPLF understood that there was no need for peace talks or compromise with the Ethiopian soon-falling government and decided to continue with intensified military operations to shorten the struggle.

Nevertheless, these variable and unexpectedly changing regional alliances and superpowers' influence in the region made the situation complex for the EPLF to establish a solid and durable relationship with the regional or international actors because these countries were guided either by the USA or USSR. When the Arab countries entirely influenced the life cycle of the Eritrean liberation movement from 1961 to 1969. From the African countries, only Somalia, Sudan, Libya, and Egypt stood on the Eritrean side. But soon, with the coming of a new Maoist reformist group split from the ELF and formed the EPLF, at the same time, the regional issue started to change. Ethiopia became a communist state following the overthrow of King Haile Selassie, and the USA lost its best and most crucial ally in the Horn of Africa.

⁴⁶⁵ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part II, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 2019

⁴⁶⁷ Kempton, 1991, pp. 7-29

On the other hand, after 1970, Israel appeared to be gradually robust in the Middle East,⁴⁶⁸ with the USA as its best ally and the role of the Arab countries who helped the Eritrean liberation movement almost disappeared. Besides, when Somalia declared war on Ethiopia in 1977, after nearly seventeen years of close relations, the USSR condemned Somalia.⁴⁶⁹ It became on the side of the communist regime in Ethiopia, supporting it with all kinds of military assistance against Somalia and Eritrea, and in the Middle East with the coming of Anwar Sadat in Egypt and a peace agreement between Syria, Egypt and Israel,⁴⁷⁰ the USA became more dominant in the Middle East than in the Horn of Africa. Hence, the EPLF, during its first organisation congress in 1977,⁴⁷¹ decided to work in broadening the Eritrean liberation struggle as part of global revolutionary movements against imperialism and Zionism while mainly engaging in advancing its organisation aspects and curbing internal factions, simultaneously emphasising the importance of the conscious Eritrean masses organisation both at home and abroad.

Chapter-5

EPLF's Foreign Policy Objectives and Strategies

5.1 Introduction

As explained in chapter two of this master thesis on the background of Eritrea, Eritrea is a small geographical territory in the Horn of Africa with a unique historical, cultural and civilisation background. It existed before the birth of the modern nations and national territories. It has had a long-exited trade and cultural exchange with the Greeks, Romans and the Far and Middle East through its strategic Port of Adulis on the coast of the Red Sea.⁴⁷² However, the continuity of Eritrea (Midri Bahri, former name for Eritreea) since the 1st century AD has been dramatically influenced by the rise and demise of various kings and kingdoms of the four neighbouring countries: Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, and Somalia.⁴⁷³ But the most bearing in shaping Eritrea's latest territorial, political and social features were the rivalries between the feudal rulers of the highlands of the modern Eritrean, northern Ethiopia

⁴⁶⁸ Murden, 2000, pp. 28-29

⁴⁶⁹ Jackson, 2010, pp. 27-38

⁴⁷⁰ Karawan, 1994, pp. 249-261

⁴⁷¹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxvii

⁴⁷² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 38-40

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 118-123, 506-510, 43-44

(Tigray and Amhara regions) of the 19th century and the by-product of the Catholic Lazarist missionary Padre Giuseppe Sapeto who led the conquest of Eritrea (*Midri Bahri*) by Italy in 1889.⁴⁷⁴

Following the Italian occupation, the territory of Eritrea developed the complete modern state features of an Italian administrative region in the Horn of Africa. Besides, by the end of the Second World War, it was transferred to the temporary British Administration and later to the federation with Ethiopia.⁴⁷⁵ All these regional and global competitors that appeared after World War II were mainly categorised into two hemispheres, the East and West blocks, with the emergence of the Cold War. These actors dragged the Eritrea case or question of self-determination back and forth, and the USA-led groups won in convincing the newly born UN to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952.⁴⁷⁶ Instead of allowing the Eritrean people independence as part of the decolonisation of Africa.

Thus, the above-presented events and decisions made the Eritrea people furious, and a struggle for independence from Ethiopia began in 1961.⁴⁷⁷ Ambitions and the need for freedom from foreign occupation accompanied the early phase of the Eritrean liberation struggle established by the ELF. Still, clear, self-developed ideological and struggle strategies were needed to liberate Eritrea's physical territory from Ethiopia and the most vital ideological roadmap to make the state of Eritrea from scratch.⁴⁷⁸ Therefore, the elites who established the EPLF saw this vacuum within the ELF and initially tried to discuss and improve its organisational aspects. Still, the ELF did accept the new ideas from these reformist groups and began to hunt them.⁴⁷⁹

At this junction between 1969 and 1974, a tremendous and concatenated political, military and geopolitical development such as the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia by the communist regime of Col. Mengistu Hailemariam and his colleagues, the birth and publication of the first political manifesto of the EPLF, the Eritrean first civil war from 1972 to 1974 and the early signs of the decline of the influence of the USA and gradual appearance

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 321-327

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, 2011, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, 2011, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv

⁴⁷⁷ Negash, 1997, p. 151

⁴⁷⁸ Pool, 2001, pp. 63-90

⁴⁷⁹ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 337

of the USSR in the horn of Africa, were the events that considerably influenced the views, strategies and policy choices of the EPLF at its inception.⁴⁸⁰

Therefore, this chapter will investigate the EPLF's foreign policy objectives and strategies and the challenges and advantages of these choices for the general Eritrean liberation struggle and the region. Hence, to accomplish this study easily before going to the discussion of the highlighted point above, I will critically analyse three primary sources from three different perspectives of the three actors who were engaged in the Eritrean liberation war that extended from 1961 to 1991, the ELF, EPLF and the Ethiopian government: the first document is the resolutions of the Second and unity congress of the EPLF that took place from 12 to 19 March 1987,⁴⁸¹ the second one is transcribed Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe in a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977; he was the President of the Central Council of the Executive Committee, the official spokesman of the ELF and the previous head of the foreign mission of the ELF during the 1960s⁴⁸² The last and third sources are from the Ethiopian side. They contain interviews with Ashagre Yigletu, the deputy prime minister of Ethiopia during the 1980s. These interviews are divided into four parts: the first three are approximately 45 minutes long, and the fourth is one hour and eight minutes long. Yigletu led the Ethiopian delegation throughout all the peace talks with the EPLF.⁴⁸³

Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF and ELF (CL)

The resolutions of the Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF and ELF (CL) held in 1987 in the liberated areas of Eritrea were executed ten years after the first EPLF organisational congress in 1977.⁴⁸⁴ Among the participants of the 1287 individuals in this meeting were the freedom fighters, various Eritrean public organisations from inside and outside Eritrea, representatives of different political organisations and parties, individuals and friends of Eritrea, and two Eritrean political parties participated. The congress, in the first place,

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 2011, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii

⁴⁸¹ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁸² Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe in a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 retrieved from RDC, categorised under the Eritrean reviews No. 40, 41 and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

⁴⁸³ Interviews of Ashagre Yigletu, who served Ethiopia in different positions and was the Deputy Prime Minister during the last years of the 1980s, will be analysed to understand the diplomatic development and peace talks between Eritrea and Ethiopia from 1983 to 1991. Yigletu led the Ethiopian delegates or team in all the negotiations.

⁴⁸⁴ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

discussed issues related to the internal features of the liberation movement, focusing on the importance of fostering national unity under the vanguard of the EPLF, with a particular focus on the democratic improvements of the organisation and strongly condemned individuals or groups within the Exiled ELF in Sudan and the Arab countries working with external forces to create an obstacle for Eritrea struggle and gather support in the name of the Eritrean people and use it for a different purpose.⁴⁸⁵

Another issue discussed during the Second Congress was the issue of finding a peaceful solution between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In this context, the EPLF reminded the referendum proposal of 21 November 1980.⁴⁸⁶ The congress argued that the Eritrean people are always a “peace-loving people”; however, they have been obliged by Ethiopia's abusive and dominant behaviour to go to war to find a solution to the question of self-determination. Nonetheless, if Ethiopia were genuinely interested in a peaceful resolution, the EPLF and the Eritrean people would always be ready to deal with it without compromising the Eritrean interests. This means the only solution that the EPLF could accept is if Ethiopia agrees to provide a popular referendum for the Eritrean people to decide their fate.⁴⁸⁷

Concerning the peace resolution, the EPLF congress stated, «It is possible to create a political ground for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa.»⁴⁸⁸ A peaceful atmosphere can safeguard the interests and rights of self-determination of the population of the region's countries. On the other hand, the congress condemned the Ethiopian government's brutal actions against the Eritrean people. It highlighted that the EPLF is working closely with Ethiopian revolutionary movements to overthrow the dictatorship in Ethiopia and create a better future for both countries.⁴⁸⁹

Regarding foreign policy, the second congress briefly discusses the broad aspects of the EPLF's foreign diplomatic perspectives. Before going into details of the foreign policy issues discussed, compared to the first organisational congress, there is a considerable change in the EPLF's approach or language use between the first and the second congresses. To begin with, regarding the approach towards the USA, the second Congress did not use imperialism during

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁸⁸ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

its meeting in 1987 to describe the USA.⁴⁹⁰ Besides, the words selected to express the USA's deeds were more diplomatic or moderate, stating simply the USA's historical alignment since the end of the Second World War and investing on the side of Emperor Hailesilase to crush the Eritrean question of self-determination, unlike the expression on the documents of the resolutions of the first organisational congress, in which the EPLF declared failure to “Imperialist USA and Zionism”.⁴⁹¹ During this meeting, it moderately condemned the killing of the Palestine people and asked the USA to support the Eritrean struggle.

On the other hand, during this meeting, the EPLF strongly condemned the USSR, which stood on the side of the Eritrean people when the federation was installed in 1952,⁴⁹² opposing the USA's decision to support the Ethiopian government and taking a positive approach to the Eritrean question of self-determination; however, starting in the mid-1970s, it entirely reciprocally supported the communist regime of Ethiopia, which came to power by overthrowing Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974.⁴⁹³ The USSR, particularly starting in 1977, supported the Ethiopian government to curb the Somalian invasion of Eastern Ethiopia and the Eritrean liberation movement.⁴⁹⁴ Hence, the EPLF, during this meeting, condemned the USSR's action and recommended that the USSR stop investing in crushing democratic revolutionary movements around the world, in the Horn of Africa and particularly the Eritrean struggle for self-determination. These actions are only causing death and destruction to the entire region.⁴⁹⁵

Besides its organisational and struggle strategy valuations of the previous ten years, the EPLF-ELF (CL) congress has discussed and drawn its perspective and opinions regarding its foreign policy framework in a broader view than its first organisational congress with a seeable continuity in its managerial and struggle strategy apart from the little and gradually positively changing attitude towards the USA and State of Israel, which can be interpreted due to the slowly decreasing Cold War competition atmosphere between the USA and

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁹¹ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

⁴⁹² Connell D. T., 2011, p. 478

⁴⁹³ Documents from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁹⁴ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

USSR in Horn of Africa as well as the confusing changing geopolitical aspect of the region.⁴⁹⁶

Within this pretext, the Congress of 1987 critically discussed and contextualised its foreign policy agendas and released its communique on the Global level (on UN, Europe and Africa), Regional (on the Arab League, Islamic Conference Organisation) and the neighbouring (Somalia and Sudan). Besides Palestine, countries, organisations, and personalities, in general, highlighted the importance of supporting the just struggle of the Eritrean people and reminded these structures and actors to play a constructive role in the stability of the Horn of Africa in general.⁴⁹⁷

This time, it equally criticised the USSR and USA regardless of their previous history concerning the Eritrean question of self-determination. It reminded them to avoid their conspiracies in the region.⁴⁹⁸ Congress also demanded that the UN, as an international forum, have the authority and obligation to solve the Eritrean case.⁴⁹⁹ Regarding the European countries, on the one hand, the Congress appreciated many European governments and political parties providing humanitarian and material support to the Eritrean people and standing on the side of the just course of the Eritrean people and expressed its gratitude to the European Parliament for condemning the Dergue regime in Ethiopian for its criminal acts against the Eritrean people. While condemning on the other side, some European countries support the Ethiopian government.⁵⁰⁰

Regarding the African Union and African countries, the congress stated that “nothing that the Eritrean question and support for the Eritrean people’s cause should have been one of Africa’s priorities”.⁵⁰¹ The congress reminded African countries to support the Eritrean question of self-determination, highlighting that the cause is part of African decolonisation.⁵⁰² Simultaneously, it expressed its sympathy and support for the South African, Azania and Zambian struggle against the Apartheid rulers. Besides, it condemned the injustice and killing of the Palestinian people.⁵⁰³ On the regional sphere, as always, it appreciated the Arab

⁴⁹⁶ Pool, 1993, p. 389

⁴⁹⁷ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰⁰ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰² Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰³ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

League, Islami Conference Organisation, and the regional countries and called again to intensify their material and moral support for the Eritrean liberation struggle led by the EPLF.⁵⁰⁴

In addition, the congress expressed its appreciation for the solidarity and support the Somali people and government offered to the Eritrean struggle and condemned the Ethiopian aggression against Somalia.⁵⁰⁵ The Congress also thanked the non-governmental organisations, peace-loving groups, and individuals who continuously supported the Eritrean struggle and expanded humanitarian assistance to the Eritrean people during the hardship created by the draughts and the war and requested them to continue their good deeds to bring about positive change not only in Eritrean but the stability in the entire region.⁵⁰⁶ Moreover, it expressed gratitude to the unwavering position of the Sudanese people and government towards the Eritrean people.⁵⁰⁷

The concluding recommendations of the congress stressed improving relationships between individuals and organisations. They highlighted the importance of close supervision of the various organisations and their activities in and outside Eritrea for better efficiency. Moreover, it emphasised revising and improving the different laws, working hard to improve the socioeconomic and politico-cultural of the society, encouraging political activities among people, giving extra focus on gender equality or empowering women's participation in all sectors,⁵⁰⁸ working hard to unite all nationalist forces and deepen cooperation with Ethiopian democratic movements to bring peace and stability to the Horn of Africa region.⁵⁰⁹ Besides calling up Eritrean students, graduates and professionals in the Middle East to come to the field and teach Arabic. However, the call was not limited to the Middle East; it applies to all Eritrean professionals worldwide.⁵¹⁰ All in all, the communique of this meeting shows that the EPLF appears to have matured a substantial government apparatus and was preparing to upgrade the gradually built public administration or organisational features of the movement, its domestic and foreign policies, and diplomatic outreaches for post-independence. This

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰⁸ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, March 12-19, 1987

political aspect of the EPLF can be reflected by cross-checking Yiglet's interviews from the Ethiopian perspective.⁵¹¹

Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe

Critically analysing the transcribed Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe, who was the President of the Central Council of the Executive Committee, the official spokesman of the ELF and the previous head of the foreign mission of the ELF during the 1960s, which was delivered in a press conference held in Kuwait with the Kuwaiti Press Association, in 1977.⁵¹² This analysis helps the reader understand the EPLF's ideological roadmap and foreign policy strategies compared to the ELF's perspective. For straightforward reasons, the ELF was ideologically the main enemy of the EPLF from the Eritrean side because the EPLF's founders were considered disobedient elites to the mother party, the ELF.⁵¹³ This can be exemplified by the famous folklore used among the Eritrean society and many Arab and Asian nations.

*The scorpion that eats its mother is used to reprimand a child who does not behave properly with his parents. The female scorpion is believed to die during parturition, caused by its youngsters eating it from the inside. Similar sayings and narratives exist in Iran, India, and Nepal.*⁵¹⁴

During the press conference introduced above, which was initially held in Arabic, translated to English and Published by the Eritrean Liberation Front (E.L.F) and Popular Liberation Forces (P.L.F.) in May-June 1977 under the title "Eritrea to declare independence shortly," Sabbe announced that it was likely to declare Eritrea's independence either in the Liberated areas or after liberating the entire country during mid-1977.⁵¹⁵ In addition to this, he said, "The realisation of the declaration of independence depends on the ongoing discussion of unity between the EPLF and ELF and adds to make the Red Sea free from the influence of

⁵¹¹ Yegletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engeda Dr Asagre Yegletu January 2019 part 1, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm6yr_ylsFQ. In part one of his video interviews, although his government was at war with EPLF, Yigletu explicitly admired the political, military, and organisational capacities of the EPLF by contrasting them with those of other Ethiopian revolutionary movements like TPLF.

⁵¹² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 412-414

⁵¹³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 210-217

⁵¹⁴ Frembgen, 2004, p. 101

⁵¹⁵ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively.

the superpower's conflict, it was necessary to study the matter objectively without hue and cry.”⁵¹⁶

Historically, Sabbe, a diplomat by practice since the early years of the Eritrean liberation struggle, contributed economically and diplomatically to the movement. His reputation was enormous in the Arab countries.⁵¹⁷ Besides, thanks to his diplomatic outreach, the first ELF groups, like Issayas, Romedan, and other colleagues, were sent to China for advanced military and ideology courses.⁵¹⁸ Moreover, his initiatives laid the groundwork for the vast support of the Somalian and Sudanese governments and people. The provision of Somalian Passports to Eritrean citizens for international movement when the Ethiopian government refused to provide passports, especially to Eritreans who were outside its controlled areas, goes all to Sabbe's merit and diplomatic play with the Somalian government and the Arab League.⁵¹⁹

However, based on his interview, Sabbe seems to have less understanding of the battlefield when it comes to practically understanding the aspect of the Eritrean field of struggle. Indeed, his duty was on a foreign mission, and most of the time, he was on journies outside the Sahel, mainly around the Arab countries, lobbying for Eritrean self-determination. My argument here is not meant to undermine his role. Nonetheless, officially stating that Eritrea was on its way to declaring independence in 1977 politically and militarily seems a premature decision. In 1977, critically looking at the situation of the Eritrean liberation struggle and regional aspects with a particular focus on the Russian interference in the Horn of Africa, unless and otherwise the independence was gained peacefully, it would be fatal to try to take complete control of Eritrea and declare independence mainly for two reasons.

The first one is that the Eritrean field of struggle did not develop one united political organisation; only three years have passed since the end of the first Eritrean Civil War, which took place from 1972 to 1974.⁵²⁰ Still, these two forces, the EPLF and ELF, are suspicious of each other. Their peace agreement or cooperation is temporary and superficial, designed to defeat the external enemy, the Ethiopian government; empirical facts and oral histories or

⁵¹⁶ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively.

⁵¹⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 412-414

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, 2011, p. 145

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, 2011, p. 413

⁵²⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 150

narrations tell that there was high ideological tension or polarisation not only between the elites of the two organisations but also among the ordinary fighters of the two groups.⁵²¹ So even if they could push the Ethiopian forces from the territory of Eritrea entirely and declare independence, the probability of a fierce civil war was around the corner.

The second reason was the Soviet Union's support for the Ethiopian regime of Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam. The Russians began to assist Ethiopia following Somalia's invasion of Ogaden, a region in eastern Ethiopia, in 1977.⁵²² After almost 17 years of close cooperation, the USSR completely changed its alignment on the Ethiopian side during this war. It started to provide Ethiopia with military, economic, and technical assistance to crush the Somalian forces in the east and the Eritrean movement in the north.⁵²³

Thus, giving a press conference concerning Eritrea's declaration of independence amidst all those unpredictable regional political and military landscapes, besides the unmatured political leadership nature of the Eritrean liberation movement, shows indeed a lack of proper understanding of the actual ideological and organisational development of the Eritrean struggle. Besides, such communique from the leading elites of the ELF rushing to gain independence without developing an adequate leadership that can predict his practical situation tells the utopian ELF political vision of Eritrea while the Eritrean field and the horn of Africa, in general, needed a pragmatic and realistic leader and political vision.⁵²⁴

Moreover, Sabbe, like the EPLF, expresses his appreciation to the Sudanese and Somalian governments for supporting the Eritrean liberation struggle and the people in general. He continuously analyses and interprets the political situation in the Horn of Africa, comments on the Ethiopian-Somali conflict, aligning himself with Somalia, and, on the other side, speaks on the Ethiopian-Sudanese gradually developing border conflict and informs that Ethiopia is sending its troops westward to the border of Sudan.⁵²⁵ Additionally, he criticises some Arab countries without giving details of which countries they are precisely. But generally warn them to stop interfering in the Eritrean internal conflict. Besides, he lists the

⁵²¹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 150-152

⁵²² Ibid, 2011, pp. 478-479

⁵²³ Ibid, 2011, pp. 478-479

⁵²⁴ Indeed, instead of rushing to declare independence in 1977, the right decision was the complete Strategic withdrawal from all the liberated areas, like what the EPLF did in 1978, to reorganise, contain and defeat the enemy systematically in a prolonged period. See *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea* by Dan Connell and Tom Killion 2011, pp. 481-482

⁵²⁵ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

forces behind the Ethiopian government, like Israel, Cuba and the USSR. Highlighting that it is worthless to support the decaying dictatorship in Ethiopia, which is not for the advantage of the peace-loving Eritreans and the population of the Horn of Africa.⁵²⁶

Unlike the EPLF elites, Sabbe's speeches are typical of I, Me My.⁵²⁷ These words or expressions have huge meanings for societies like Eritrean sociocultural and economic situations to mobilise and win them on your side. As I previously introduced in chapters three and four of this master thesis, the core ideological indoctrination of the EPLF begins from thinking and communicating collectively and for a common interest. Not only during the liberation struggle but also still, it is hard to hear an EPLF elite or political cadre expressing based on his individual feeling or perception of a given situation related to a political discussion and arguments. They pronounce their opinion or comments beginning with WE, Our, and US. All this originates with the first EPLF political manifesto, *Our Struggle and its Goals*.⁵²⁸ These simple phrases have tremendous meaning when they usually say we, the People of Eritrea, our struggle or our dream and mission for Eritrea.....make the people feel part of the struggle, and they easily win the support of the majority of the Eritrean people.

Last, Sabbe called on the UN, OAU and the Arab League countries to push and convince the international community of the Eritrean right to self-determination.⁵²⁹ Besides, he underlines that the USSR is pushing the ELF to agree on reestablishing the Eritrean federation with Ethiopia.⁵³⁰ In this context, he directly replies that the Eritrean people are not accepting the federation. Besides, although the Eritrean freedom fighters are fragmented into different parts, they still do not accept forced marriage with Ethiopia.⁵³¹ Moreover, when he was asked about the Comments given by Issayas Afereki with the Saudi Newspaper al-Madinah on August 14 1977, he replied, "The PLF (a faction of ELF led by Sabbe) leadership would like to draw attention to those expressions which Mr. Issayas uttered with a malicious sectarian breath, and which carried general accusations against a big sector of the Eritrean people. The

⁵²⁶ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

⁵²⁷ Ibid, March to August 1977

⁵²⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 314

⁵²⁹ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

⁵³⁰ Ibid, March to August 1977

⁵³¹ Ibid, March to August 1977

PLF leadership would likewise wish to warn Mr Issayas and the members of his inner circle not to slip into such a swamp which will swallow them up before those against whom they make unfounded accusations.”⁵³²

Interviews of Ashagre Yigletu

The third primary source for this chapter is the 2019 interviews of Yigletu conducted by exiled Ethiopian Broadcasting called ESAT—Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio. The interviewer was renowned Ethiopian journalist Sissay Agena, based in Washington, D.C. It was conducted under ESAT Yesamintu Engda Dr Ashagre Yigletu Part 1, part II, part 3, part 4, executed consecutively on the second, ninth, sixteenth and twenty-third of January 2019.⁵³³ The interview was conducted in the Amharic language (Ethiopian official language), and I directly analysed his speech after carefully listening to all four of his interviews. Indeed, during the research of this master thesis, my linguistic skill was an excellent advantage in gathering and cross-checking different texts and information related to the Eritrean struggle. I speak ten languages (English, Italian, Arabic, Swedish, Norwegian, Spanish, Tigrigna, Tigre, Bilen and Amharic), and this background has contributed a lot to accomplishing this project.

Ethiopian communities around the world funded ESAT.⁵³⁴ It was established on April 24, 2010, by a group of leading exiled journalists, most of whom were jailed, tortured, or forced into exile, to provide accurate, objective, and balanced news, analysis, information, perspective, entertainment, talk shows, documentaries, sports, and cultural programming on Ethiopia and the rest of the world.⁵³⁵

Yigletu, during his interview, speaks not only about the peace talks with EPLF but also about issues related to the general political-military development of the Ethiopian government during the 1980s and the nature of the Ethiopian relationship with the USA and USSR.⁵³⁶ And highlight the crucial point that led to the decline of Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopian in 1991 and how Mengistu managed to escape to Zimbabwe and secure political

⁵³² Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

⁵³³ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqslk>

⁵³⁴ ESAT, 2012, <https://ethsat.com/>

⁵³⁵ ESAT, 2012, <https://ethsat.com/> (at the moment, ESAT is no longer in exile; it established all its broadcasting programmes in Ethiopian Addis Abeba following the coming of the Nober prize winner Prime Aby Ahmed in 2018 in Ethiopian)

⁵³⁶ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqslk>

asylum despite his gross human rights abuses and murders that made him wanted by the Ethiopian government and international court but was able to get a safe settlement with his friend Roberto Mugabe of Zimbabwe.⁵³⁷

In part one of his interviews, Yigletu begins his speech by saying, “Today, after twenty-seven and half years since I left Ethiopia via Bole Airport in Addis Ababa in 1991, I am heading to London for the peace talk organised by the American government led by Mr Herman Cohen, an American diplomat who was the United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs from 1989 to 1993. It is my first interview regarding the Ethiopian political situation apart from the last press conference I released in London before I flew to the USA when the peace talk was unexpectedly interrupted due to the EPLF and TPLF overthrowing the government in Ethiopia and simultaneously the EPLF-controlled Eritrean declaring independence of Eritrean and the TPLF took over Ethiopian establishing transitional government made by all the democratic revolutionary movements in Ethiopia. Indeed, regarding those peace talks, many things have been, and as an individual who led all those meetings, I was reserved from giving interviews, although many concerned individuals asked me to do so. However, today, I am standing in front of the Ethiopian people to give my voice regarding the stated issue. Before proceeding to my argument, I would like to thank you and ESAT for providing this opportunity. My gratitude also goes to those Ethiopians who have sacrificed their lives to produce the tiny rays of democracy we optimistically experience in Ethiopia.”⁵³⁸

The meeting was supposed to be between the EPLF, TPLF, and the Ethiopian government.⁵³⁹ However, when they reached London and were placed in their respective hotels, Yigletu was called by Mr Cohen, who was staying separately in a different hotel.⁵⁴⁰ Yigletu was shocked by Mr. Cohen's unexpected news. Cohen told him that, on behalf of the government of the USA, he wanted to talk to him about his future and that of his colleagues. Because the EPLF

⁵³⁷ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT, Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 part 3, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtSaRo6XfhY>

⁵³⁸ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁵³⁹ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT, Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 part 3, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtSaRo6XfhY>

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid

and TPLF had already taken over Asmara and Addis Ababa, the government of the USA is ready to give asylum to you and your team.⁵⁴¹

Following this unexpected event, Yigletu and his colleagues flew to the USA with Mr Cohen's help and were granted asylum in the USA.⁵⁴² On the other hand, the EPLF liberated the entire Eritrean territory from the Ethiopian occupation by military force. Eritrea became an independent state following the referendum, which took place from April 23 to 25, 1993, supervised by the UN. With overwhelming votes of yes (99.8%), Eritrea became a member of the UN.⁵⁴³ Simultaneously, the TPLF, creating an umbrella of a pan-Ethiopian coalition with democratic movements in Ethiopia (mainly from the Amhara, Oromia and Somali regions), established a transitional government in Ethiopia.⁵⁴⁴

Thus, the core points of the Yigletu interview regarding the peace talks with EPLF are the political, military, and diplomatic aspects of the EPLF and the Ethiopian government during the 1980s, particularly since the defeat of the Ethiopian government in the Red Star War of 1982 in the Sahel region of Eritrea.⁵⁴⁵ They can be summarised as follows.

Yigletu said, “The secret peace talks began between 1983 and 1984, in the first place due to the fear within the Ethiopian leadership when they saw that the EPLF was considerably progressing and the power balance began to weigh on the EPLF side, despite the huge support from Russians. Hence, finding a solution before it became too late was proposed by the Dergue political office even though Col. Mengistu's position was arrogant towards the EPLF.”⁵⁴⁶ These meetings were always organised by the Ethiopian embassies in the eastern European countries, Italy and Greece and the EPLF diaspora community leadership who had a direct connection with the leadership in the field of struggle in Sahel and organised all the journey for the leaders of the EPLF in Sahel to participate in those meetings. Those meetings

⁵⁴¹ Yigletu, 2019, *ESAT*, Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 part 3, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtSaRo6XfhY>

⁵⁴² Ibid

⁵⁴³ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 443-444

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 505-506

⁵⁴⁵ Yigletu, 2019, *ESAT* Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁵⁴⁶ Yigletu, 2019, *ESAT* Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

were commonly done in hotels, mainly in cities of Italy and Greece, like Rome and Athens, with high secrecy.⁵⁴⁷

In those secret meetings, Yigletu argues that the delegates of the two parties developed an excellent working environment. Indeed, the meeting did not bring a final and binding peace. However, he underlined that they agreed to continue working to bring peace and decided to make their meeting public. The USA took the first action to lead initial peace talks in Atlanta in August 1989, under the leadership of The Carter Center, where ex-President Jimmy Carter led those talks. Another meeting was held in November 1989 in Nairobi, Kenya, through the mediation of the Carter, but still, there was no positive outcome.⁵⁴⁸ Yigletu stated that the EPLF's position was rigid and very difficult to negotiate. The Ethiopian government had prepared two alternatives for the negotiation: federation or regional autonomy, while the EPLF would only agree on a referendum, making the negotiation challenging.⁵⁴⁹ However, Yigletu highlights his appreciation of the EPLF's determinations and principles of their arguments and the personal integrity and capacity of Issayas Afewerki, the General Secretary of the EPLF.⁵⁵⁰

To summarise my source criticism of Yigletu's interview with the three main arguments relevant to EPLF diplomatic outreach and struggle strategies, Yigletu highlighted three points that facilitated the demise of the Ethiopian communist regime and gave rapid rise to the EPLF between 1982 and 1989. The first was abolishing the Ethiopian and USA cooperation and defence agreements signed with Emperor Haile Selassie and aligning with the USSR.⁵⁵¹ In fact, by doing this, Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam secured tremendous support from the USSR. However, the USA could not easily digest this and continuously discussed it with the Ethiopian government through its diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa to recover the lost diplomatic ground in the Horn of Africa; however, when the Ethiopian government rejected them.⁵⁵² Yiglet said, "The US government raised the issue of human rights abuse and local population displacement in the name of humanitarian assistance through its NGO. Within the

⁵⁴⁷ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 1,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqjsk>

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, January 2019

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, January 2019

⁵⁵⁰ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqjsk>

⁵⁵¹ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqjsk>

⁵⁵² Ibid

issue of human rights, the situation of the Ethiopian royal family imprisoned after the fall of emperor Haile Selassie repeatedly raised and was of primary concern for the Americans.” Yigletu reiterated that the Ethiopian government did not want to address those concerns. Consequently, the US government began to help the EPLF indirectly,⁵⁵³ and the Eritrean voice began to appear gradually in the global arena.

The second was the internal movement in the USSR, which was technically known as the Perestroika and Glasnost. This movement demanded openness and reforms within the Soviet Union's political situation.⁵⁵⁴ This movement affected the USSR and Ethiopian government in terms of military assistance. Following this movement, the Soviets cut military aid and began to pressure the Ethiopian government to make it engage in peaceful solutions with the EPLF.⁵⁵⁵ The last point was the internal rivalries within the Dergue inner political circle, which led to the failed coup d'état of 1989.⁵⁵⁶ As a result of this, Col. Mengistu passed a decision of death penalty for 92 military Generals and officials, and Yigletu said, “The measure taken by Col. Mengistu exasperated the mistrust and caused fear within the communist ruling party in Ethiopia.”⁵⁵⁷

5.2 Shaping Foreign Policy Objectives

When the European colonisers left Africa physically following the end of the Second World War and the emergence of the issue of human rights incorporated with the international organisations that advocate for broader human values and related aspects of justice under the umbrella of the UN,⁵⁵⁸ Many African countries had the opportunity to construct and develop their respective nations and formulate their foreign policy objectives. However, Eritrea's destiny went differently. Unfortunately, the UN decided to transfer Eritrea from the temporary British administration, which substituted the Italian colonisation, to a new form of colonialism: the Ethiopian and Eritrean federation, which the US-led block through the UN formal procedure blessed the short-lived forced marriage (Federation) in New York in 1952.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, since its inception, the EPLF has dedicated itself to correcting this decision. Besides, its foreign policy objectives were deeply rooted in its goal of achieving

⁵⁵³ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, January 2019

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, January 2019

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid, January 2019

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, January 2019

⁵⁵⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 298-301

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, 2011, pp. 298-299

Eritrean independence and establishing a sovereign state, which could only be realised by uniting all citizens under one and strong leadership.⁵⁶⁰

As can be seen from its official documents of the Second and Unity Congress of 1987, which was used as a primary source in this chapter, the EPL highlights the importance of forging a functional foreign policy strategy even in the two sources used in chapters three and four which are the first EPLF manifesto of 1971 and the resolutions of the first organisational congress of 1977.⁵⁶¹ However, the EPLF's unique nature, even compared with ELF and its arch-enemy (Ethiopia), is its distinguished skill of prioritising or giving extra attention to its internal organisation, ideological workability, and mobility.⁵⁶² Indeed, empirical facts show that the EPLF believes in the enormous importance of a shaped foreign policy strategy, a framework for nations to engage with each other through different activities, such as diplomacy, trade deals, defence cooperation, and humanitarian assistance.

Commonly, a nation's interests are represented via foreign policy projections. However, numerous factors affect foreign policy and objectives. One crucial factor is internal, and this national factor contains different issues that must be appropriately developed and addressed.⁵⁶³ Among these are the ideological approach of the leading political organisation, economic situations, mass opinion or participation, and cultural considerations of a given territory. Domestic factors and related issues are crucial to developing a foreign policy.

Thus, looking at the documents of the EPLF's second congress in 1987, we find that the EPLF developed a well-articulated foreign policy strategy after sixteen years since its origin in 1971.⁵⁶⁴ But before showing such multidimensional diplomatic enthusiasm, the EPLF worked intensely for years in and outside Eritrea on a broad basis to disseminate its ideological vision for the future Eritrean, which it explicitly introduced via its political manifesto published in 1971.⁵⁶⁵ Through this project, the EPLF brought the majority of Eritreans towards a common focal point. That is a united Eritrean front through the vanguard

⁵⁶⁰ Pool, 2001, pp.132-136

⁵⁶¹ In all three documents used in previous chapters three and four and the current chapter, EPLF underscores the importance of devising a well-defined foreign policy strategy. However, as stated by Yigletu, the most visible EPLF diplomatic activities were registered since the secret peace talks with Ethiopia in 1983. These activities were followed by repeated military triumphs, a testament to the effectiveness of their foreign policy strategy after the 1982 Red Star War.

⁵⁶² Pool, 2001, pp. 105-131

⁵⁶³ Holsti, 1970, pp. 247-271

⁵⁶⁴ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 213

⁵⁶⁵ Nihnan Ilamanan document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-009, EPLF political manifesto (unpublished material) produced November 01, 1971

of the EPLF, avoiding all religious, gender, and class or economic inequalities, fighting and marching for the longed Eritrean independence.⁵⁶⁶

Rooted in its political manifesto of 1971, the EPLF developed a vital ideological tool of mass enlightenment; parallel to the ongoing liberation struggle on the war fronts from 1971 to 1977, the EPLF created the basics of public administration and organisational frameworks of a government in the liberated areas and connected this government body with Eritreans who live under the Ethiopian occupation and those exiled in various parts of the world via its Cadres and representants, under the slogans of the *Let the learned teach and the unlearned learn*.⁵⁶⁷ The EPLF's first organisational congress was held in 1977 to evaluate the development and experience gained and set future direction.⁵⁶⁸ This meeting took place amidst a complicated geopolitical and internal conflict atmosphere. However, while it evaluated its previous activities and laid its future directions, it focused on working intensively on mobilising, enlightening, and organising the Eritrean people to create a more compact nationalist movement to curb any internal faction and regional political dynamics that could affect the organisation's flourishing.⁵⁶⁹

By the end of the 1970s, the EPLF secured its position as a political organisation among the Eritreans and began calibrating its diplomatic policies and strategic objectives. The first tangible diplomatic and strategic activities by EPLF can be considered alliances and cooperation with the democratic movements inside Ethiopia.⁵⁷⁰ This decision seems to be workable for two main reasons. One, the revolutionary movements in Ethiopia and the EPLF have a common enemy: the Ethiopian government. Second, they are neighbours, and besides, both forces can raise accusations against the Ethiopian communist regimes. In addition, it highlighted how the EPLF interprets the USA and Israel activities in the region, labelling them as anti-Eritrean benefits and, on the other hand, appreciating the Sudanese, Somalia, and most of the Arab countries' sympathy towards the Eritrean liberation movement.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁶ Pool, 2001, pp. 59-62

⁵⁶⁷ This is an unpublished document from RDC, EPLF / His / Mil / 1 / 03101 / RDC., which provides comprehensive coverage of EPLF developments from mid-1978 up to 1985 enemy offensives, offering valuable insights into this crucial period., p. 59

⁵⁶⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, xxxvii

⁵⁶⁹ Pool, 2001, pp. 105-131

⁵⁷⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 503-505

⁵⁷¹ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0016, Resolutions and Recommendations of Second and Unity Congress of the EPLF-ELF (CL) (unpublished material) produced March 12-19, 1987

Parallel to this, vast diplomatic groundwork was being developed through various Eritrean public organisations and EPLF elites in different parts of the world. In Europe and the USA, the Eritrean communities organised locally, breaking through every barrier against Eritreans previously dominated by Ethiopian ambitions, narrating Eritrea as part of Ethiopia in the Western Hemisphere.⁵⁷² These communities established yearly festivals; on this occasion, inviting journalists, political parties, and interested humanitarian and NGO organisations made the voices of the Eritreans heard everywhere.⁵⁷³

5.3 Forging Strategic Diplomacy and Alliances

A renowned Ethiopian scholar, Ghebru Tareke, in his article titled *From Af-Abet to the Shire: The Defeat and Demise of Ethiopia's 'Red' Army 1988-89*,⁵⁷⁴ he described the EPLF's ascendance into the global arena. During the last three years of the 1980s, the EPLF scored a wide range of military and diplomatic goals. During the *Af-Abets* war of 1988, the EPLF crushed the Ethiopian army supported by Eastern Germany, Cuba and Russia. Surprisingly, four Russian military advisers were killed, and at the same time, three Russian military advisers were captured;⁵⁷⁵ this news gave rise to broader discussions regarding the EPLF's military capacity. Notable newspapers like the New York Times covered it widely.⁵⁷⁶

The US government depicted the EPLF Marxist revolutionary movements while the Russians, on the other hand, called the EPLF imperialist.⁵⁷⁷ Meanwhile, this broad discussion about the EPLF and the Eritrean case gave the EPLF a favourable position, allowing it to appear as a vanguard of the Eritrean-leading liberation movement. To provide a clear and concise nature of the USA and USSR's diplomatic approach towards Eritreans, the USSR had a positive attitude towards Eritreans from 1945 to 1974. Then, following the coming of Col. Mengistu to power in Ethiopia, it aligned with the Ethiopian government against Eritrea; following the weakening of the Ethiopian government, it began to moderate its tune and

⁵⁷² Information E. M., 2014, *Commemorating 40th Anniversary of Bologna Festival*.

<https://shabait.com/2014/07/04/commemorating-40th-anniversary-of-bologna-festival/>. The Bologna Festival, one of the many Eritrean festivals celebrated globally, played a crucial role in raising awareness about the Eritrean liberation struggle. This struggle, with its global impact, was a cause that resonated with societies worldwide. The festival, organised by the supporters of the EPLF, was a vital platform to gather financial support, emphasising the urgency and importance of such support.

⁵⁷³ Ibid, 2014

⁵⁷⁴ Tareke, 2004, pp. 239-281

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, 2004, p. 253

⁵⁷⁶ Rule, 1988, p. 22

⁵⁷⁷ Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Ethiopia: Background information on the EPLF; Information on EPLF violence against the civilian population*, 1 June 1989, ETH1291, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6ac9374.html> [accessed 17 May 2023]

started pushing for peaceful negotiations after 1985. On the other hand, the USA was the primary architect of all odds against Eritreans from 1943 to the mid-1980s. Similarly to the USSR, when the EPLF was getting the upper hand over Ethiopia, it began considering peaceful alternatives.



The three Soviet officers were captured in Af-Abet. From left: Lieutenant Alexander Vicrovich Covaldin, Colonel Yuri Petrovich Kalistrov and Colonel Yevigniew Nicolayecich Churayef ⁵⁷⁸

In 1988 and almost exactly a year later, the Ethiopian Revolutionary Army (ERA), which party members sometimes fondly referred to as qeyu tor (the Red Army), suffered major defeats at the hands of the northern insurgents: the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).⁵⁷⁹ It never recovered from these devastating losses. Two years later, the national arm victory of the Eritrean rebels at Af Abet, that has been compared to the famous Vietnamese triumph at Dienbienphu in 1954, was a turning point in the long conflict because it heralded the demise of the Ethiopian military and the and the regime it supported.⁵⁷⁹

The *Af-Abet* war, also known as the break of *Nadew Iz* (a military division of the Ethiopian government led by General Nadew was stationed in Nakfa for about nine years), was a turning point in the EPLF's military and diplomatic progress.⁵⁸⁰ Like what Tareke has presented, Yigletu defined it clearly due to internal and external factors. The Ethiopian regime was collapsing, and the 1989 peace talks led by Carter signalled that the two powers (the USA and USSR) had understood that the leadership of Col. Mengistu Hailemariam

⁵⁷⁸ Meleca, 2019, [Afabet, March 1988: The Decisive Battle for Eritrean Independence. | Il Corno d'Africa \(ilcornoafrica.it\)](https://www.ilcornoafrica.it/)

⁵⁷⁹ Tareke, 2004, pp. 239-240

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid, 2004, pp. 239-276

would never be recovered. Thus, the USA gradually began to soften its approach towards EPLF to prepare for the after Mengistu, as Yigletu underlined in his interview.⁵⁸¹

Indeed, all the promising progress of the EPLF, both in the military and diplomatic areas, had its origin, particularly in victories secured during the Red Star War of 1982, in which Ethiopian was fully assisted by Russia and its allies (East Germany and Cuba) weapons and military science strategy.⁵⁸² Historical records show that in 1983, the EPLF public organisation and diplomatic agencies, in cooperation with the Eritrean communities in different parts of the world via the EPLF representatives and cadres in the diaspora, accomplished broad global lobbying activities. The delegates of the Eritrean organisations visited about 22 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe.⁵⁸³

Similarly, the good friends of Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan, the same year, from 7th April to 11th of 1983, in the meeting held in Albufeira Portugal as XVIth congress of the Socialist International reminded the UN and OAU as an international platform representing respectively the global and African issues must play a primary role to recognise and grant the Eritrean right to self-determination.⁵⁸⁴ This strong diplomatic tie with these two countries as close neighbours and good allies, in addition to the solid diplomatic relationship the EPLF developed in years with the TPLF and EPDM (Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movements), was an evidence of the skilful EPLF strategic development of diplomacy and alliances.⁵⁸⁵

Central to all those diplomatic activities held in 1983 was a symposium held in the liberated area of Eritrea (Sahel). Nineteen scholars and researchers from Europe, America, and Africa participated in this symposium, and many EPLF Cadres from different departments participated.⁵⁸⁶ In the meeting, the participants assessed the progress of the Eritrean revolution under the EPLF vanguard. Besides, there were great expectations of distributing or making public the victories accomplished by the EPLF worldwide by the participants.⁵⁸⁷ The

⁵⁸¹ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁵⁸² Meleca, 2019, [Afabet, March 1988: The Decisive Battle for Eritrean Independence. | Il Corno d'Africa \(ilcornodafrika.it\)](https://www.ilcornodafrika.it/)

⁵⁸³ This is an unpublished document from RDC, EPLF / His / Mil / 1 / 03101 / RDC., which provides comprehensive coverage of EPLF developments from mid-1978 up to 1985 enemy offensives, offering valuable insights into this crucial period., pp. 56-59

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, From 1978 to 1985, pp. 56-57

⁵⁸⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 261

⁵⁸⁶ This is an unpublished document from RDC, EPLF / His / Mil / 1 / 03101 / RDC., which provides comprehensive coverage of EPLF developments from mid-1978 up to 1985 enemy offensives, offering valuable insights into this crucial period., p. 57

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid, From 1978 to 1985, p. 57

support of the UAE, mainly in education, was appreciated, primarily due to the success recorded through the help it contributed.⁵⁸⁸ Similarly, the same year, a high-level delegation led by the EPLF Deputy Secretary, Afewerki, participated in the Socialist Party of France's congress.⁵⁸⁹ All these above-listed diplomatic activities and many related diplomatic engagements, which are not listed but are available in the sources I gathered from RDC in Asmara, Eritrea, were accomplished only in 1983. This shows that following the victory of the Red Star War of 1982, the EPLF began to flourish both in diplomacy and the military.

Looking at the EPLF diplomatic developments and forging alliances from another point of view through the Yigletu interviews is vital to make the study reasonable. This interview presents the issue from the Ethiopian perspective and reflects on the EPLF victories presented by the Pro EPLF sources. According to Yigletu, The Ethiopian government initially wanted to avoid negotiating with EPLF.⁵⁹⁰ However, following the vast losses in the war and the systematic EPLF engagement to ignite democratic revolutionary movements inside Ethiopia, close cooperation with these movements to crack the Ethiopian government not only on the Eritrean front but also from inside Ethiopia changed the Ethiopian government's attitude towards the EPLF.⁵⁹¹

The massive diplomatic manoeuvres parallel to the battle victories it gained were confirmed by Yigletu's interview that revealed that between 1983 and 1984, the Ethiopian government met with EPLF secretly in Athens and Rome before publicly asking for an international mediation, which we saw that the US government agreed to mediate through the Carter Centre in 1989.⁵⁹² When those secret meetings with EPLF began, the TPLF also signalled to the Ethiopian government that they would like to negotiate.⁵⁹³ In the TPLF's case, Yigletu said, "Col. Mengistu rejected the peace talks saying that if we agree with EPLF, the TPLF will not have any significant role. However, after a long discussion with the central committee, we have approved a meeting with the TPLF with the help of the previous Italian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Mr Rossi."⁵⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Yigletu reiterates that the meeting was

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, From 1978 to 1985, p. 57

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid, From 1978 to 1985, p. 57

⁵⁹⁰ Yigletu, 2019, *ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqslk>

⁵⁹¹ Ibid

⁵⁹² Yigletu, 2019, *ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqslk>

⁵⁹³ Ibid, January 2019

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid, January 2019

fruitless, and they did not meet again until 1991 in London. The plan in London was to negotiate with both TPLF and EPLF. Still, the meeting was unexpectedly interrupted in May 1991 when the EPLF and TPLF took over Eritrea and Ethiopia, respectively. The rest of the peace talks in Atlanta and Nairobi, mediated by Carter in 1989, were all with EPLF.⁵⁹⁵

Besides, the EPLF delegations toured Italy, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Somalia, and France in the same year.⁵⁹⁶ On the other hand, ERA (Eritrean Relief Association), in cooperation with the Eritrean support committee in Europe, prepared meetings with numerous humanitarian and aid organisations in Belgium from 28 to 29 April 1983.⁵⁹⁷ Another crucial event was the occasion regarding the peoples' rights, revolution, and struggles in the southern hemisphere, which was held in Rome. In this meeting, the Eritrean revolution was among the issues discussed, and a detailed study about the liberated areas and the EPLF experience was the focus.⁵⁹⁸ Moreover, on 26 April 1983, a pictorial show by a member of the Belgium parliament, Willie Kypers, was presented in Bruxelles the use of internationally protected chemical gas Napalm by Dergue or Ethiopian troops against the people.⁵⁹⁹

In all the above diplomatic and international activities, we can see how significant the role of the Eritrean masses was in organising the diaspora event. Indeed, the EPLF leaders and political elites were part of these active and international movements to make the Eritrean voice heard widely alongside their daily assignment of facing military challenges in the Eritrean field of struggle. However, the anatomy of the EPLF political activities, whether inside or outside Eritrea, is systematically made up of most Eritrean people. As its name indicates, people's front, the people are made in such a way that they are active initiators and protectors of the national values and visions created and well disseminated into the minds of the broad masses of Eritrea by the EPLF. Whatever the EPLF wants to do in the name of Eritrean, it has a highly sophisticated informal channel within the society, and its wills and plans are made in such a way that they come from the people. So, the core argument of the strength of the EPLF is the science it had developed to discipline itself not as elites leading the people but as elites volunteering to sacrifice themselves to be the voice of the people.

⁵⁹⁵ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqsk>

⁵⁹⁶ This is an unpublished document from RDC, EPLF / His / Mil / 1 / 03101 / RDC., which provides comprehensive coverage of EPLF developments from mid-1978 up to 1985 enemy offensives, offering valuable insights into this crucial period., p. 57

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid, From 1978 to 1985, p. 57

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, From 1978 to 1985, p. 57

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, From 1978 to 1985, p. 57



Al-Amin Mohamed Saiyed, head of the EPLF negotiating team (l) and Ashegre Yigletu, head of the Ethiopian government negotiating team, were brought together in Atlanta by President Carter.

From left: Al-Amin Mohamed Saiyed, and on the right side, Ashagre Yigle of Ethiopia. On the Back, Jimmy Carter, ex-president of the USA.⁶⁰⁰



President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya joined President and Mrs. Carter at the opening ceremony of the Nairobi talks. L to R: Dr. Ashagre, President Carter, President Moi, Mr. Al-Amin.

Standing from left, Ashagre, Carter, Moi of Kenya and Al-Amin.⁶⁰¹

5.4 Paving the Path to Statehood

⁶⁰⁰ Zmeselo, 2019, <https://mereja.com/forum/index.php>

⁶⁰¹ Zmeselo, 2019, <https://mereja.com/forum/index.php>

Regardless of all arguments surrounding the issues of the Eritrean liberation struggle against Ethiopia, one crucial factor magnetised all arguments and thoughts that accompanied the EPLF's victory in liberating Eritrea and simultaneously rediscovering and reassembling the basics for Eritrean statehood as a sole actor.⁶⁰² These historical and legal factors that ruled the connections between the two territories (Eritrea and Ethiopia) are the alpha and omegas of the entire journey. Eritrea had well-founded historical and legal sources for its demand for self-determination.⁶⁰³ However, the dominant ambitions of Ethiopia, escorted by the superpowers' conflicting interests to dominate the strategic position of the Red Sea, swallowed the Eritreans' appeal for justice, which indirectly shows the will of the superpowers to recognise the rights or interests of the newly emerging states is dependent of the external security matters of these power.⁶⁰⁴ In the above sub-chapter, I have explained how the EPLF systematically engaged with the international community in different ways and on various occasions to advocate for its cause of Eritrean independence. Besides, we have seen the role of international actors such as the USA and multiple institutions and non-governmental organisations in shaping the EPLF's policy and their direct or indirect contribution to paving the path to Eritrean statehood.

Therefore, within the context of factors contributing to the paving way to the establishing Eritrean statehood, there might be various interpretations and narrations based on the Eritrean historical background and depending on the perspectives of the individual or groups studying the issues and the bench march they refer to investigate the Eritrean liberation struggle. However, after detailed research, this study found five core factors that facilitated the making of Eritrean statehood, which will be discussed below.

The first issue was the Dergue's (the ruling party in Ethiopia that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974) approach towards Eritrea and its struggle strategy against the Eritrean liberation movement.⁶⁰⁵ Although both Dergue and Haile Selassie equally killed and destroyed Eritrean people and infrastructure, showing less interest and respect to the people, they were hugely rushing and eager to assimilate Eritrean territory with Ethiopia for its strategic position in the Red Sea.⁶⁰⁶ Haile Selassie was sometimes diplomatically skilful and tried to appear as a man of goodwill through the Eritrean Unionist party and Eritrean

⁶⁰² Pool, 2001, pp. 132-157

⁶⁰³ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 518-519, 371

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, 2011, pp. 525-528

⁶⁰⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, 174-176

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, 2011, pp. 174-176

Orthodox church, pretending to solve the issue differently than Col. Mengistu, the chairman of the Dergue.⁶⁰⁷ Since his early years of power, Megistu has begun declaring and holding military parades, officially proclaiming in stadiums and national broadcasts that he will destroy the EPLF once and forever. Simultaneously, he shows the military support gained from the USSR, which can directly be used to silence the EPLF and other revolutionary democratic movements within Ethiopia (TPLF, ONLF, and OLF).⁶⁰⁸ Hence, Dergue's attitudes made the Eritrean people ideologically and practically unite with EPLF to fight for their existence.

The following issues are the exhaustion of the USSR support to the Ethiopian government and the end of the Cold War, which both came simultaneously, mainly after 1985, with reformative movements in the USSR and the gradual reduction of the tensions between the USA and the USSR. Besides the slow ending of the Cold War, the Russians began to cut military support from Ethiopia.⁶⁰⁹ They started putting pressure on Mengistu to negotiate with EPLF. Similarly, as I have discussed above, the USA was unhappy with Col. Mengistu when he changed his alignment with the USSR, cancelling the existing Ethio-USA relationship.⁶¹⁰ These two coinciding events gave the EPLF plus points for overcoming the existing Ethiopian dominant voice globally, and the EPLF began to climb diplomatic heights.

In addition, the multidimensional EPLF struggle strategy is divided into two fronts: the armed struggle and the diplomatic movement.⁶¹¹ The diplomatic campaign was broadly masses-based or executed by the various Eritrean diaspora community organisations and public administration led by the *Jemahir* in liberated and semi-liberated areas, which systematically connected to the areas under the Ethiopian occupations began to function wholistically exploiting the vacuum created by Mengistu's struggle strategy began to push the dynamics of the Eritrean liberation movement unstoppably, particularly following the military victory of the 1982 and the demise of the ELF.⁶¹² At this point, the EPLF began to see the skeleton of the ideal Eritrea it spoke, thought, and impossibly fought for years. However, these politically

⁶⁰⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, 519-521

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid, 2011, pp. 442-443

⁶⁰⁹ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁶¹⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 331-332

⁶¹¹ Pool, 2001, pp. 63-104

⁶¹² Connell D. T., 2011, p. xxxviii

and diplomatically fertile grounds could not give life and flesh to the halfway assembled Eritrean statehood.

Thus, besides its reasonably and comparatively winning diplomatic and struggle strategy, the EPLF needed the superpower's blessings; at this point came the role of the USA. According to Yigletu, during the late 1980s, the US government systematically tried to eliminate the Dergue Regime.⁶¹³ The issues of human rights, the famine and displacement of thousands of people from their villages, and the use of hunger as a weapon against the Eritrean population that led thousands to flee to Sudan and the liberated areas under the EPLF were among the main concerns of the US government when discussing with the Ethiopian government.⁶¹⁴ However, when Col. Mengistu did not want to pay attention to the US government's repeated appeals, the US government initially began to support the EPLF invisibly through aid agents or humanitarian organisations.⁶¹⁵ Finally, following the 1989 peace talks led by Carter in Atlanta, the USA gradually avoided hostile measures against the EPLF.⁶¹⁶ Hence, when Col. Mengistu escaped in 1991, the US government under the Bush administration reversed its policy following Cohen's declaration, Assistant Secretary of the US Government for Africa, that his government would support a UN-supervised referendum to recognise Eritrean self-determination.⁶¹⁷

5.5 Conclusion

Therefore, the EPLF's foreign policy objectives and strategies were instrumental in facilitating Eritrea's struggle for independence and shaping its diplomatic engagements during the liberation movement. External or foreign policy dimensions commonly represent a nation's or an organisation's interest. However, properly functioning or efficient foreign policies and objectives are directly influenced by the internal factors of a given country. These factors could be political, economic and ideological. Thus, it is crucial to properly develop and address these factors based on historical and cultural features before proceeding with external engagements. So, the EPLF's central argument of disagreement with the ELF was these internal organisational aspects of the Eritrean liberation movement. As I have previously discussed in chapters two, three and four repeatedly in the context of the

⁶¹³ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 3, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtSaRo6XfhY>

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, January 2019

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, January 2019

⁶¹⁶ Troco, 2019, p. 25

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, 2019, p.25

ideological struggle strategy disagreements, differences and disagreements between the ELF and EPLF, the EPLF continuously criticised the ELF on its ideological and organisational aspect.⁶¹⁸ In return, the ELF continued to reply with repeated underestimation and repulsive words to the EPLF reformative approach until its demise in 1981.⁶¹⁹ These ELF arguments can be grasped from Sabba's words during his press release in Kuwait 1977.⁶²⁰ Following the dissolution of the ELF into different factions after the Adobha meeting in 1969, Sabe developed a connection with the three parties (*Ala, Aden, and Obel*) and helped these three groups allied as ELF-PLF throughout 1971.⁶²¹ For this reason, he was accused of ELF as an instigator of the first civil war; however, due to his extreme religious attitude, he could continue with a highly secular new movement and returned to lead the rest of the ELF in 1973 again.⁶²² Hence, we can see again in the speech of 1977 in Kuwait directly attacking Issaya. He directly warns Afewerki and his organisation with the following expression.

*“Mr. Isaias uttered with a malicious sectarian breath, and which carried general accusations against a big sector of the Eritrean people. The PLF leadership would likewise wish to warn Mr. Isaias and the members of his inner circle not to slip into such a swamp which will swallow them up before those against whom they make unfounded accusations”*⁶²³

However, regardless of all those accusations, the EPLF kept going forward and developed its ideological approach, which embodied Eritrean values with highly centralised and secular organisational features, to bring the Eritreans to a common point: Eritreanism as a centre of gravity for a successful liberation struggle, avoiding religious and regional attitudes.⁶²⁴ Through this mechanism, working as a primary goal on masses enlightenment and indoctrination broadly in and outside Eritrea in the Eritrean diaspora community organisations, the EPLF created a vast majority of individuals and groups of volunteer and life-long informal diplomats or citizens advocating for their nation (Eritrea).

⁶¹⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 414

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, 2011, p. xxxviii

⁶²⁰ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

⁶²¹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 413-414

⁶²² Connell D. T., 2011, 2011, p. 414

⁶²³ Speeches of Mr Osman Saleh Sabbe at a press conference held at the Kuwaiti Press Association in 1977 were retrieved from RDC and categorised under the Eritrean reviews Nos. 40, 41, and 43 from March to August 1977, respectively

⁶²⁴ Connell, 1993, p.83

Therefore, relying on this solid and broad nationalism background, it began to engage globally through a combination of strategic diplomacy, alliances, and international engagement widely organised and run by the Eritrean communities in the diaspora, which had a direct connection to Sahel (Eritrean field of struggle).⁶²⁵ Moreover, with the organisation's military and political growth, the EPLF began effectively navigating the complex regional and global geopolitical landscape. By analysing the EPLF's foreign policy-building strategy, we gained valuable insights into the diplomatic intricacies that liberation movements could experience and their contributions to the quest for sovereignty. According to Cabral's interpretation, the second phase of liberation struggle theory comes after a country is liberated from foreign occupation. Does the outcome of the liberation struggle satisfy the majority of the population?⁶²⁶ which is not part of the scope of this master thesis, the development that came after 1991 when Eritrea was liberated.⁶²⁷ However, it opens a clear gate to further research into the EPLF's foreign policy dynamics and promises of the newly born state.

Chapter - 6

Summary and conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents this research's unique and significant findings, which are intriguing and have profound implications for future studies. As highlighted in the introduction (Section 1.3), there is a substantial gap in understanding the EPLF ideological roadmap, its struggle strategy, and diplomatic policies during the Eritrean struggle period, particularly from 1977 to 1991. This era is of immense importance, not just in understanding the nature and success of the Eritrean liberation movement but also in deciphering the structure of the Eritrean government today. Therefore, this investigation emerged from this crucial gap, and this last section of the thesis successfully links the primary inquiries with the empirical findings. Following the summary of key findings, the chapter digs into unresolved matters in question

⁶²⁵ Information E. M., 2014, *Commemorating 40th Anniversary of Bologna Festival*. <https://shabait.com/2014/07/04/commemorating-40th-anniversary-of-bologna-festival/>. The Bologna Festival, one of the many Eritrean festivals celebrated globally, played a crucial role in raising awareness about the Eritrean liberation struggle. This struggle, with its global impact, was a cause that resonated with societies worldwide. The festival, organised by the supporters of the EPLF, was a vital platform to gather financial support, emphasising the urgency and importance of such support.

⁶²⁶ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 46

⁶²⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, xl

for further investigation that have come up from the limitations and challenges of this study. The last compartment is the conclusion, where I explain the distinctive inferences of the arguments in the main body of the text on theories about the national liberation struggle and the subsequent state-building. Therefore, this chapter is divided into findings, implications for further study, and the conclusion.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

As highlighted in Chapter One, the fundamental objective of this research is to critically investigate the complicated aspect of an Eritrean liberation struggle, the guiding principles of the EPLF as a leading actor of the Eritrean liberation movement during the last era of the battle and the enduring implications for a broader context. The EPLF's ideological roadmap from 1977 to 1991 serves as a compass, directing the research through the maze of Eritrea's domestic and foreign policy formation and revealing the lessons that history holds for the present and future. The statement drafted in this part is the synopsis of the outcomes of the inquiry's three sub-main research questions. The research questions, formulated based on the research purposes, were:

- I. How did the EPLF formulate its foreign policy objectives from 1977 to 1991, and what ideological and strategic considerations influenced these objectives?
- II. What diplomatic strategies and alliances did the EPLF employ to advance its foreign policy agenda, and how did these strategies evolve?
- III. How did the EPLF engage with the international community and advocate for its cause during its struggle for independence, and what role did international actors play in shaping its foreign policies?

Thus, three of the above-presented research questions are discussed accordingly throughout the text: Research question one was addressed in Chapter 3, research question two was explored in Chapter 4, and research question three was discussed in Chapter 5.

6.2.1 Ideological and Strategic Makeover in Outsmarting ELF Politically and Militarily.

Chapter three discloses the anatomy of the EPLF's ideology and its struggle strategy. Before going into what ideological and strategic considerations influenced the objectives of the EPLF, these ideologies and strategies influenced its diplomatic network; it will be an excellent answer to begin with where the EPLF came from in the beginning. The EPLF was

incepted by some of the principal elites of the ELF, who were sent to China by the ELF itself for advanced military and ideological courses to improve its organisational and struggle strategies. However, when these elites returned to the battlefield after concluding their courses, the ELF was unprepared to handle the new ideas. A good example that could explain the disagreements between old and new ideas can be presented, not always, but in many cases, by the metaphor used by Jesus Christ while preaching in public. Jesus Christ of Nazareth was an apocalyptic preacher and teacher of the early days of the first century who lived throughout Judea, modern-day Israel.⁶²⁸

*And no man putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.*⁶²⁹

When the new elites returned from China in 1968, the old guards of the ELF ultimately rejected the reformist group and tried to absorb them by different means, even killing some of them.⁶³⁰ However, as clearly explained in chapter two, in the early years of the Eritrean liberation struggle, which was from 1961 to 1969, as a background study for the EPLF ideological development, the ELF organisation features were arranged in terms of religion and regional spheres besides its political organ was established outside Eritrea in the Arab countries.⁶³¹ These new ideas of the returnee from China shook the entire Eritrean liberation movements in and outside Eritrea. Consequently, different meetings took place, some in Sudan and Egypt, but most compelling were those in Aredaib and Anseba inside Eritrea in 1968.⁶³²

Unfortunately, these meetings could not solve the issue, and the Adobha meeting took place in 1969; it established the Kiyad El Ama (Central Command), which appointed representatives from all five regional divisions to guide the entire liberation movement.⁶³³ Still, things worsened due to ELF's dominant and divisive ambitions and the substantial and radical reform demands of the China group charged with Maoism.⁶³⁴ During these transition

⁶²⁸ Burton, 1920, pp. 316-336

⁶²⁹ Luke 5 37-39 King James Version (KJV)

⁶³⁰ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 337

⁶³¹ Ibid, 2011, pp. 210-218

⁶³² Ibid, 2011, xxxvi

⁶³³ Ibid, 2011, 38

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 2011, pp. 224-225

and challenging moments, those elites who later became EPLF in 1971 revealed themselves in three different movements: PLF1, PLF2, and PLF3, commonly known as the Ala, Aden, and Obel groups, which are mainly chronologically represented by Issayas Afewerki, Romedan Mohamed Nur, and Abu Tiyara.⁶³⁵

Thus, during the early 1970s, the EPLF appeared vesting, secularism, organisational centralism, sat at the forefront of the Eritrean social and political movements, leading a movement that decided to establish a classless society striving to unite the entire society (men, women, Muslim, Christians, peasants, student, bourgeois), spiced with Maoist ingredients adequately mixed in a balanced way with the Eritrean social and cultural landscape while rejecting any imported ideological dogmas or imported ready-made liberation struggle strategies like what the ELF did, copying the Algerian struggle strategy which was based on regionalism.⁶³⁶ This was one of the failures and the religious issues that caused the ELF to collapse. However, these groups learned from the Chinese experience while in China. Issayas was deeply immersed in Maoism and impressed by the similarities between the early internal revolutionary conflict in the Chinese and the Eritrean Movements.⁶³⁷

Amilcar Cabral, a national liberation struggle theorist, refuses to import any dogmatic principles or models of revolutionary struggle.⁶³⁸ But he remained faithful to the dialectical unity of theory and practice, which he presents concerning his analysis of the struggle he led. He recalls that every practice produces a theory and that if it is true that a revolution can fail even though it is based on perfectly conceived theories, nobody has yet made a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory.⁶³⁹ Working within the framework of historical materialism and fully aware of the lessons to be learned from other revolutionary experiences worldwide, he elaborated a rich and distinctive revolutionary strategy based on a meticulous study of his country's social, economic, historical, and geographical conditions.⁶⁴⁰

Therefore, the EPLF, combining the Chinese Experience, the above-listed concepts and ideological approaches, and the Eritrean social, economic, historical, and geographical features, established its struggle strategy by completely transforming the existing ELF

⁶³⁵ Ibid, 2011, pp. 223-228

⁶³⁶ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 559-561

⁶³⁷ Connell D. , 2001, p. 349

⁶³⁸ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 50

⁶³⁹ Ibid, 1984, pp. 50-51

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid, 1984, p. 50

struggle mechanism. This strategy was revealed in 1971 when the first political manifest, *Nihnan Ilamanan (Our Struggle and its Goals)*, was published.⁶⁴¹ Outlining its future struggle strategy in three main points that the Eritrean field of struggle will tolerate only one inclusive revolutionary front, and the political and military organs of this movement must be based inside Eritrea officials rejecting the authority of the ELF representants trade in the name the Eritrean people wandering around the Arab countries to gather financial support in the name of the Eritrean cause but mainly used for the popularity and advantage of those individuals who have never been to the battlefield.⁶⁴² Finally, it emphasises the masses' organisation and participation in the struggle as the Eritrean liberation struggle belongs to the people, and the EPLF will face the challenges among its people, gradually preparing to build a government in the liberated and semi-liberated area.⁶⁴³

Standing on these ideological and struggle strategy frameworks, the EPLF projected the early phases of its foreign policy objectives through two parallel directions with clear missions, which were timely during the 1970s within the context of the Eritrean question of independence. One was it officially declared failure to Zionism and Imperialism. It affirmed that it would continue to fight against these powers by allying with other revolutionary movements who have similar views towards these forces, as these powers Zionism mainly mean the establishment of the State of Israel. Israel was among the leading actors who invested too much since its birth to curb the Eritrean liberation movement on the side of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. Imperialism, representing the USA and its allies, was another structure and agent that rejected the decolonisation of Eritrea and pushed the UN to bless the Eritrean Ethiopian federation in 1952.⁶⁴⁴ Still, this one and the USA continued to be the main power against the Eritrea liberation struggle.

The other direction of diplomatic outreach was projected to make the Eritrean revolution part of the broader global liberation movement against imperialism by creating connections and cooperation with other revolutionary movements in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Asia under the vanguard of the EPLF, unlike the ELF, which was mainly inclined towards the Arab countries. While they are integral parts of the EPLF strategy, these initiatives were

⁶⁴¹ Pool, 2001, p. 68

⁶⁴² Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 210-218

⁶⁴³ Pool, 2001, pp. 105-131

⁶⁴⁴ Connell D. , 1993, pp. 55-59

reiterated formally during the first organisational congress of the EPLF in 1977.⁶⁴⁵ Representatives of the Communist parties from Italy and France and revolutionary movements from Palestine, Oman, and Ethiopia participated in this meeting.⁶⁴⁶

In addition, a broad diplomatic campaign through the Eritrean diaspora community began in the early 1970s to raise awareness about the liberation struggle among the global society and simultaneously gather financial support for the freedom fighters in Sahel (EPLF).⁶⁴⁷ One of the extraordinary aspects of the EPLF public organisation or nationalist teaching and indoctrination is revealed in the continuity and efficiency of the Eritrean diaspora community.⁶⁴⁸ These movements worldwide, even today, are among the best connections between the diaspora community and homeland. As Eritrea is in the troubled region of the Horn of Africa that attracts global and regional actors, the EPLF prescient ideological vaccination of Eritreanism that began in 1971 has been preached for the last 54 years, and this made the EPLF ideology regenerated automatically within the Eritrea community spaces.⁶⁴⁹ Thus, the diplomatic activities of the Eritrean diaspora community were the most vital and efficient contribution of any formally organised or assigned diplomatic mission in Eritrea's history.

6.2.2 The Rise of Revolutionary Governance and Distinctive Ideological Framework.

In chapter four, I have discussed the Political Landscape, Regional Dynamics, and Role of Major Powers in the Horn of Africa, particularly the issues that directly or indirectly influence the EPLF organisational and struggle strategy developments. In return, these organisational innovations within the EPLF gave birth to a more inclusive and advanced political landscape in the Eritrean battlefield. Through this lens, this research in chapter four strived to identify what diplomatic strategies and alliances the EPLF employed to advance its foreign policy agenda, besides how these strategies evolved to give the preliminary pillars of the state apparatus in the caves of Sahel when the EPLF declared the Sahel as a nation and EPLF as a government to connect the Eritrean people under the Ethiopian occupation and

⁶⁴⁵ Document from RDC. ASE-EPLF-DOC-0010, first EPLF congress (unpublished material) produced January 23-31, 1977

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid January 23-31, 1977

⁶⁴⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 176-177

⁶⁴⁸ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 176-177

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, 2011, pp. 176-177

exiled in diaspora to the central command in Sahel at the same time training itself to function as a state.

Hence, these diplomatic strategies began primarily focusing on two main elements: the first one was working on mass bases.⁶⁵⁰ This means that the Eritrean question of self-determination was hindered by a few global powers that convinced the UN during its early years that an independent Eritrea or autonomous Eritrean territory has never existed; it has always been part of Ethiopia. Therefore, it should be federated under Ethiopia.⁶⁵¹ Thus, the first diplomatic strategy parallel to the battle inside Eritrea was to awaken ideologically the Eritrea communities scattered as refugees escaping the Ethiopian persecution worldwide, stimulating them to voice the Eritrean cause at any possible occasion, individually or collectively.⁶⁵²

The diaspora community organisations and their diplomatic manoeuvres, carrying the future Eritrea through the EPLF vision under the two touching and never-separating slogans *Zelalemawi Zikri Ni Sematatna* and *AWET Ni Hafash* (Glory to Our Martyrs and Victory to the Masses) became a game changer in the EPLF diplomatic move.⁶⁵³ This movement has flamed Eritrean nationalism. In universities, government offices, international organisations, churches, mosques, Synagogues, bars, and open squares, wherever an Eritrean individual crossed or got the opportunity to present him/herself began to speak about their denied rights. The world started to question what had happened to Eritrea and Eritreans, and this opened the first and most crucial diplomatic gate or, in other words, international attention to the Eritrean cause.

The second diplomatic step was creating international space or broadening its political outreach by establishing networks with another revolutionary movement against imperialism and neo-imperialism, mainly through the Eritrean diaspora organisation representants in which most of these diaspora community leaders or elite were highly indoctrinated political cadres. These cadres lobbied primarily through socialist or communist political parties in

⁶⁵⁰ Pool, 2001, pp. 105-131

⁶⁵¹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 249-250

⁶⁵² Pool, 2001, pp. 129-130

⁶⁵³ Pool, 2001, pp. 105-106. Besides seeing a typical speech by President Issayay Afewerki (Information E. M., 2018, <https://shabait.com/2018/06/20/president-isaias-speech-on-martyrs-day/>), we can understand how these symbolic phrases have massive meaning for the Eritrean identity-building process. Still, today, any official Eritrean ceremony concludes by saying, “Glory to Our Martyrs and Victory to the Masses.”

countries like Italy.⁶⁵⁴ Besides, the Arab countries and North America have built and influenced Eritrea's community organisations.⁶⁵⁵ Through these and related diplomatic activities, like preparing festivals yearly, the Eritrean community in these countries invites the local population to introduce them to Eritrean culture, cuisine, traditional music, and arts. These peaceful activities shared with the local population drew the population's attention, helping the local population develop intimate relationships with Eritrean communities.⁶⁵⁶ Through this mechanism, the Eritrean communities in various parts of the world provided opportunities and the early stages of the EPLF diplomatic activities while it was physically in the mountains of Sahel to challenge the Ethiopian military occupation in Eritrea.

In this context, Amilcar Cabral, a national liberation struggle theorist, speaks again about what makes revolutionary guerrilla warfare different from other guerrilla war is its political strategy, which consists of winning the population to the revolutionary objectives of national liberation, enhancing the people's creativity and their ability to be self-reliant, and preparing the liberation movement for the exercise of power after victory.⁶⁵⁷ Besides, he underlines the creation of a parallel government in the liberated areas to carry out the social and economic tasks necessary for satisfying the people's aspirations.⁶⁵⁸ This was in a similar way exercised by the EPLF when established the state apparatus in the Sahel, in which this central command in the Sahel had a direct connection with the Eritrean population through *Jemahir* (public administration and organisation authority),⁶⁵⁹ which was established in the liberated and semi-liberated area, besides the area under Ethiopian occupation through *Fedayin* and *Hafash Wudubat*.⁶⁶⁰ The Eritrean communities in the diaspora were engaged and synchronised with the Sahel via its Cadres positioned in all the countries where exiled Eritreans lived.

6.2.3 Ideological Evolution and Foreign Policy Agenda.

The EPLF Foreign Policy Objectives and Strategies are discussed in chapter five. In this chapter, I explained how the EPLF engaged with the international communities to advocate for its cause during the struggle era, mainly since 1983; what role did the international actors

⁶⁵⁴ As we can see in Pool's book *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front*, 2001, political teaching or cadres school is based on the thoughts of Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism. Besides early diplomatic engagements of the EPLF based on the documents of its first and second congresses, we have a close relationship with community parties in Italy and France.

⁶⁵⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 176-177

⁶⁵⁶ Arnone, 2014, pp. 79-87

⁶⁵⁷ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 52

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 1984, pp. 52-53

⁶⁵⁹ Information E. M., 2014

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 2014

or institutions contribute to shaping its foreign policies during these seven years of struggle leading the independence on Eritrea 1991.⁶⁶¹ When it comes to investigating the international community's role during the last seven years of the Eritrean liberation struggle led by EPLF, it had varying and controversial aspects. Indeed, the AU, UN, and EU, as leading international political organisations, were not at all interested in the Eritrean case; this was mainly because US foreign policy agendas completely manipulated them,⁶⁶² and they had to be on the Ethiopian side until the defeat of the Ethiopian forces during the Red Star War campaign of 1982 in Nakfa, the capital city of the Sahel region in Eritrea.⁶⁶³

According to Ashagre Yigletu, the Ethiopian deputy prime minister and a leading diplomatic figure, Col. Mengistu Hailemariam selected him throughout the 1980s to lead all the initial secret and later official peace talks with EPLF mediated by the USA.⁶⁶⁴ In the meantime, the communist regime of Col. Mengistu officially closed all American political, military and security apparatus in Ethiopia and Eritrea when he came to power, overthrowing Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974,⁶⁶⁵ and the USA was on a continuous trail to improve its relations with Ethiopia again. However, Ashagre underlined that the US concerns were the issues of human rights, mainly the Arrested families of Emperor Haile Selassie and displaced refugees in various parts of Ethiopia.⁶⁶⁶ The reply from the Ethiopian side concerning these issues was not convincing, and the USA gradually began to think of letting the EPLF and other Ethiopian revolutionary movements defeat the Mengistu Regime, and indirectly, via its Aid agents, started to help these movements.⁶⁶⁷

On the other hand, the slowly Emerging Glasnost and Perestroika in USSR politics began to affect Col. Mengistu's regime due to the substantial reduction in Russian military support.⁶⁶⁸ Thus, all these four points, the exhausting patience of the USA towards the communist government of Ethiopia, the closure of the USSR military support to the Ethiopian regime, and the rise of moral and military capacity of the EPLF mainly after the success in the war of Red Star campaign in 1982 and concatenated revolutionary movements within Ethiopia

⁶⁶¹ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. xxxix-xl

⁶⁶² Ibid, 2011, pp. 521-531

⁶⁶³ Ibid, 2011, 442-443

⁶⁶⁴ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqslk>

⁶⁶⁵ Connell D. T., 2011, pp. 373-374

⁶⁶⁶ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqslk>

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid, January 2019

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, January 2019

following the Eritrea movement in all regions of the country (the Tigray, Amhara, Oromo and Somali regions of Ethiopia) put the Ethiopian government at crossroads providing a vast opportunity for the EPLF to navigate the international corridor.

However, despite gradually opening international possibilities, the EPLF faced numerous challenges in smoothly navigating its diplomatic outreach. This is due to Ethiopia's existing diplomatic dominance on the global stage, the weakness of both the ELF and the EPLF to engage with priority to raise their issues internationally parallel to what they invested in the military capacities, and the third point: less media coverage in Africa and the Western block due to the dominant Ethiopian occupation in Western media.⁶⁶⁹ In this case, the EPLF was and is still criticised even by its supporters.

*It is one thing to remain on the forefront of the consciousness of supporters of progressive movements throughout the world, but it is yet another to force the Eritrean cause into the minds and hearts of the average worker and citizen in Western and Eastern Bloc countries.*⁶⁷⁰

Thus, when speaking about the EPLF's engagement with the international communities to advocate for its cause, it is essential to understand that the EPLF, in its formative years, was established by angered young men and women and decided to fight not only the Ethiopian occupation but also to challenge the international injustice against their people and country. Based on the empirical facts in their documents, the EPLF's initial diplomatic tool can be interpreted as *An Eye For An Eye and Teeth for teeth*.⁶⁷¹ Ethiopia came to kill. Its allies provided it with all financial and material support, refusing the peaceful and legal solution to eliminate the Eritrean people. Hence, the EPLF decided to show Ethiopia and the international community that they could also kill and secure their interest. Therefore, they mainly focused on building their military, fighting capacity, and bowing down the shoulders of the enemy and its allies. This aggressive response can develop an opportunity for a peaceful negotiation. Such a strategic move seems to grow from the fear that Ethiopia and its Western allies dominate the international corridor and that engaging in diplomacy will only be a waste of time for tiny EPLF.⁶⁷² Gebru Tareke, a well-known Ethiopian scholar, skillfully presented the rise of the EPLF, mainly after the Red Star War of 1982.

⁶⁶⁹ Keller, 1991, p. 9

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid, 1991, p. 9

⁶⁷¹ Diamond, 1957, pp. 151-155

⁶⁷² Tareke, 2004, pp. 239-276

*“The EPLF had certainly accumulated extensive experience in mobile warfare and a massive armoury, most of it acquired from the Ethiopian military since it foiled the two largest operations waged against it in 1982 and 1983 successively.”*⁶⁷³

Indeed, the EPLF formula of a reaction for an action worked perfectly. According to Ashagre Yigletu, the Ethiopian deputy prime minister of the 1980s, the Ethiopian regime began to fear the EPLF due to successive defeats and asked for a secret peace talk with the help of friendly countries in Eastern Europe, Greece, and Italy starting in 1984⁶⁷⁴ repeatedly before the official peace talks commenced through the leadership of Jimmy Carter, the ex-president of the USA, for the first time in 1989.⁶⁷⁵ From the mid-1980s, the USSR and the USA continuously pushed for peaceful negotiations between the two powers.⁶⁷⁶ Surprisingly, the EPLF shifted the international view, which was on the side of Ethiopia, which neglected the Eritrean question for a long time. Thus, those who rejected them invited them respectfully to the table of negotiations as they had predicted. However, the Eritrean question of self-determination was not solved peacefully; the parties at least sat face-to-face to solve the issue peacefully. However, the EPLF and its revolutionary allies from Ethiopia overthrew Col. Mengistu Hailemariam. They took over Asmara and Addis Ababa in May 1991,⁶⁷⁷ and Col. Mengistu Hailemariam escaped to Zimbabwe, where he still lives as a political asylee.⁶⁷⁸

6.3 Implication for future study

This study was constructed depending mainly on the national liberation struggle movement’s approach within the framework of an ideological roadmap. The focus is on how the role of an ideology can be a catalyst and simultaneously hindrance to liberation movements of state-building vision. As explained in the introduction, the scope of this academic work is to critically investigate the complicated aspect of the Eritrean liberation struggle, the guiding principles of the EPLF, and the enduring implications for a broader context. In the middle of the study, numerous arguments and challenges appeared; however, they became beyond the outline or scope of the research and dropped. The study is limited to the EPLF ideological roadmap from 1977 to 1991 and related diplomatic aspects which have a bearing on the

⁶⁷³ Tareke, 2004, p. 247

⁶⁷⁴ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁶⁷⁵ Yigletu, 2019, ESAT Yesamintu Engida Dr Ashagre Yigletu January 2019 Part 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGrmfMmqIsk>

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid, January 2019

⁶⁷⁷ Connell D. T., 2011, p. 373

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid, 2011, p. 373

direction and manoeuvres of the EPLF ideological and struggle strategy approach. Indeed, the general organisational and ideological aspects of ELF are also studied briefly as a background to the emergence of the EPLF. However, a more detailed study of the ELF's ideological considerations and struggle strategy approach to make a more genuine comparison would make the study balanced and subjective.

The research methodology procedure considered in this master thesis reflects the scope and objective of the research questions. However, while striving to address the working questions relating to EPLF's diplomatic and strategic advancement during the last 14 years of the Eritrean liberation struggle and the role of the international communities and the global actors in providing a platform for both the EPLF and the Ethiopian government, it could be more accessible and helpful if I had considered all the three different perspectives. So, it would be wiser to consider a multiple perspectives approach, allowing a broader authoritative representation of the realities equally from all sides. Hence, it would be wise if future research on the given topic considers all three perspectives, the ELF, EPLF and the previous Ethiopian government, before 1991.

Additional remarks will be required based on the challenges I faced in this research. The challenge of the selected topic due to the difficulty in finding individuals who were members of the political bureau of the previous Ethiopian government and the ELF, for a straightforward reason that some of them have died and some of them are exiled in different parts of the world thus, it would be demanding to trace them for an interview as first-person witnesses of the situation and the unavailability of enough primary sources and secondary literature particularly regarding the ideological investigations of the EPLF, posed many challenges to further investigation. Therefore, additional investigation should be compulsory on topics related to the ELF and Ethiopian views or opinions.

6.4 Conclusion

Hence, this research provided an additional angle of interpretation to our understanding of the EPLF ideological roadmap and the making of Eritrean statehood. Looking at the Eritrean liberation struggle through the lens of the national liberation struggle theory of Amilcar Cabral, the EPLF's struggle strategy, organisation features, and ideological consideration that produced an independent Eritrean in 1991, confirm the applicability of that theory for the Eritrean liberation movement. However, Cabral's theory of the national liberation movement has two phases. The first is the independence struggle, liberating the nation from foreign

occupation. The second phase deals with the issues following the independence, which means evaluating whether the battle's outcomes fully satisfied all citizens of that nation. These include the economic demands and other social and legal issues that gradually appear in the post-independence era. Therefore, the first phase of the Eritrean liberation struggle can adequately be explained by the theory of Amilcar Cabral, which only corresponds with the first phase of the theory. This is because the research is limited from 1977 to 1991. It is impossible to investigate whether the outcome of the struggle satisfied the Eritrean people or not for the apparent reason that Eritrea was liberated in 1991. The study of the thesis does not go beyond 1991.

Amilcar Cabral highlights three crucial factors that could contribute to the success of any revolutionary movement; to begin with the historical materialism framework, it is essential to be aware of the lessons to be learned from other revolutionary experiences around the world when elaborating a rich and distinctive revolutionary strategy based on a carefully studied of the social, economic, historical, and geographical conditions of one's own country.⁶⁷⁹ The next one argues a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, mass mobilisation, and the importance of political factors in the revolutionary strategy of armed struggle and, within this context, refuses any dogmatic principles or any imported models of revolutionary struggle.⁶⁸⁰ The third factor is creating a parallel government to the war front in the liberated areas to carry out the social and economic tasks necessary to satisfy people's aspirations.⁶⁸¹

Therefore, the founding elites of the EPLF revolutionary movements that overtook the ELF had learned mainly from the experiences of the Chinese Maoist revolutionary movement during their stay in China from 1967 to 1968. They applied what they had learned from China by carefully studying Eritrean historical, economic, cultural, and social features. They created their struggle strategy and ideological roadmap, unlike the ELF, which directly copied and imported the Algerian style. Simultaneously, they created government or public administration and organisation institutions in the liberated and semi-liberated areas to connect the freedom fighters and the leadership in the Sahel with the Eritrean people in and outside Eritrea to gradually develop an Eritrean statehood. Thus, when Eritrea was liberated in May 1991.⁶⁸² Automatically, within a few days, they radically changed all the

⁶⁷⁹ Ntalaja, 1984, p. 50

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 50-51

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp. 52-53

⁶⁸² Connell D. T., 2011, p. 373

organisational features and state apparatus, including the country's official language from Amharic (Ethiopian official language) to Tigrigna and other supplementary local languages without any transitional period. This shows how far EPLF was prepared to govern the country in a way parallel to the liberation struggle and simultaneously highlights the importance of creating a government in the liberated area parallel to the liberation fighting in a similar way to Caral's interpretation and presentation of vital components of a successful revolutionary movement against foreign occupation.⁶⁸³

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⁶⁸³ Ntalaja, 1984, pp. 52-53

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