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Hope of Democracy Slipping Away

Violence and arrests follow an encouraging election

By Barry Hillenbrand (*Debre Marcos 63–65*)

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THE GREAT EXPECTATIONS that marked the spring and summer have faded. That period of real democratic possibility with peaceful multiparty participation, open debate and a free press that led up to the May 15, 2005, election suddenly ended in disappointment. Ethiopia's political scene is filled once again with confrontations, violent protests, a clamp down on the press, and politicians in jail facing charges of treason. Some observers, like African specialist Terrance Lyons of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, glumly believe that Ethiopia is "undergoing a volatile process of transition" which is "not unlike that it experienced in 1991–1992 and even 1974–1977. The situation in January 2006 is both unstable and dangerous."

Ethiopians turned out in large numbers to participate in the relatively free election in May 2005. It offered voters real choices because, unlike elections in 1995 and 2000, the opposition parties decided to participate and the government allowed free debate. But the tallying of the ballots led to charges of fraud and then to violence. In June rock-throwing opposition supporters in the Merkato in Addis clashed with police who opened up with machine guns and killed at least 36 and wounded dozen

more. With blood spilt, the calm and optimism of the pre-election period evaporated.

The intervention of a group of ambassadors from countries that donate large sums to the country prevented further violence. These donor countries give \$1.9 billion a year to Ethiopia, supplying about one third of the country's budget. What's more, countries like Britain and the United States have championed President Meles as the new progressive face of African leadership. These ambassadors carry influence. They helped set up an impartial body, the Complaints Investigation Panel, to complete the election count and supervise run-off elections.

In September, the Panel announced the results of the election to the 564-seat National Assembly. The EPRDF, President Meles' ruling party, won 327 seats, with allied parties taking another 40 seats, for a total of 367 seats or 67 percent. The Opposition parties took 172 seats (31 percent), including 109 for the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), 52 for United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), and 11 for the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM). The Ambassadors' group issued a statement saying that "Ethiopia stands at a crossroads; if dialogue and the constitutional rule of law are

abandoned, the gains of the past decade will be lost. We urge all parties to take their seats in the National Assembly with good will and mutual respect, to express the interests and views of all Ethiopians in a vibrant multi-party Parliament.”

Ethiopia’s politicians did not seem to be listening. Even though these results increased the opposition’s share of seats in the Parliament from 12 to 172, the opposition parties were unwilling to accept the results. They held that they had been cheated out of a victory. International observers from the European Union and the Carter Center noted a significant number of irregularities, especially in the post-election period, but did not claim that the government party had stolen the election. The opposition parties urged the government party to join with them in a government of national unity, but Meles’ people declined.



President Meles Zenawi
photo: Reuters/Peter MacDiarmid

Many in the opposition believed that mass demonstrations — a kind of people’s power movement mirroring such efforts in the Philippines or Eastern Europe — could bring down the government. The opposition called for mass rallies and strikes. Meles said that such protests were not only illegal but were tantamount to undermining a legitimate government. In short, they were treason. In an effort to check unrest — and the opposition — the government arrested at least 45 prominent leaders from opposition parties in mid-September. As the planned date for the rally approached more arrests followed. The rally was cancelled, but when the new Parliament met on October 11, many CUD party members refused to attend. However, most of the members of the other main opposition group, the UEDF, decided to take their seats. The government stripped the boycotting members of their immunity from arrest. More were rounded up and jailed.

Meanwhile the opposition picked Berhanu Nega to become the mayor of the Addis Ababa. The CUD with its strong base among students, traders, shopkeepers and young people, secured almost all 23 seats in Addis Ababa, while Meles’ EPRDF, which

had held the post of mayor since it came to power in 1991, won nothing in the capital.

November saw more street violence as riots nearly closed down Addis. Police fired at protesters to disperse them. More people were killed. Students in towns outside the capital also took to the streets to pressure the government to release those detained during the violence. Gunshots were heard in Awassa town. Protests were reported in Dessie, Debre Berhan and Bahir Dar, where protesters stopped a bus carrying 20 European tourists and tried to set it on fire using cans filled with gasoline. Police fired in the air to disperse the rioters and the bus drove off. “The tourists were terrified. The situation is not good,” said a tour guide particularly gifted in understatement.

Meles defended the security crackdown saying grenades were thrown at police and two AK-47 assault rifles were stolen from police by rioters. He mentioned attacks on buses. “This is not your run-of-the-mill demonstration. This is an Orange Revolution gone wrong,” Meles said. He blamed the opposition. “The CUD leaders are engaged in insurrection — that is an act of treason under Ethiopian law. They will be charged and they will appear in court.” If the protesters are found guilty, warned Meles, the court could decide whether the defendants will face the death penalty or serve a prison sentence.

A statement by the ambassadors of the European Union and the United States parceled out blame to both sides and urged them to open dialogue. Opposition politicians should be released from jail and take up their seats in Parliament, said the statement. The ambassadors urged the opposition to curb their supporters and renounce violence. They called for the “reopening of the private media and the promotion of a code of conduct for the media to ensure balanced and responsible flow of information to the public.”

Meles was criticized from all sides. *The New York Times* in an editorial said: “Mr. Meles has often been lauded as an exemplar of good government by the likes of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who picked him to help draft his Commis-

sion for Africa report on how to reduce poverty and promote democracy on the continent. But it turns out that Mr. Meles is in favor of democracy only when people are voting for him.” London’s *Economist* was equally as harsh. The State Department demanded the release of prisoners or, at the very least, speedy and fair trials. But, explains George Mason’s Terrence Lyons, “Washington and Addis Ababa have found a new basis for cooperation in the global war on terrorism. In particular, both have concerns regarding al-Ittihad, a Somali Islamist organization. Washington has provided Ethiopia with bilateral military assistance, training, and economic support funds as part of the growing security relationship.” American military forces now operate around the edges of Ethiopia. Washington is not eager to disrupt that alliance.

Despite all the outside pressure, Meles pressed on with plans to bring opposition leaders to trial. But he ordered the release of more than 8,000 protesters who had been held in prison camps. On December 19, Ethiopian prosecutors formally charged 131 opposition politicians, journalists, and other political figures with crimes ranging from genocide to treason. Acts of genocide, according to Ethiopia’s penal code, include issuing “propaganda” intended to “destroy, in whole or in part, the nation.”


Among those opposition leaders facing charges are 10 elected members of parliament from the CUD, including Chairman Hailu Shawel, the opposition’s choice for mayor of Addis Ababa Berhanu Nega, former Norfolk (Virginia) State University law professor Yacob Hailemariam, and veteran human rights activist Mesfin Wolde Mariam. Thirteen journalists are among the 131. Also 17 of the accused are charged in absentia, including reporters for the Voice of America’s Amharic service and leading diaspora intellectuals and businessmen. In addition to these high profile figures, Meles told Ethiopian journalists that some 3,000 others face charges stemming from the demonstrations that followed the election.

As the year came to a close, the international community continued to put pressure on Ethiopia. The

European Parliament passed a resolution critical of Ethiopia’s human rights record, and various donor countries put \$375 million in budget support on hold. Finance Minister Sufyan Ahmed said, “Ultimately it is the poor who are the victims of this decision. It is their basic services that will be affected.” The US Embassy in Addis condemned the trials as “divisive” at a time when “reconciliation and communication” was needed. The United States also announced suspension of sales of certain military vehicles to Ethiopia but Vicki Huddleston, the acting U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia, said the United States would not cut the \$600 million in the pipeline for development and fighting HIV/AIDS.

Britain, which had earlier frozen some forms of aid, announced that it was cutting all of its aid to Ethiopia’s government, including \$35.3 million in direct budget support. London said it would redirect \$88 million in humanitarian support to relief agencies working in Ethiopia. Hillary Benn, Britain’s international development secretary, made a trip to Addis. He said, “The U.K. is seriously concerned about governance, human rights and the detention of — and serious charges faced by — opposition, media and members of civil society. Because of our concerns over the political situation I have told [Meles] that we cannot provide direct budget support under the current circumstances.”

When brought before a court in January, the opposition members charged with treason, inciting violence and planning to commit genocide refused to enter pleas. “The prison administration has denied us access to our lawyers to discuss the gravity of the charges,” Hailu Shawel, chairman of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), told the court. “I have nothing to say.”

January ended with protest and renewed violence. In Washington, Ethiopian expatriates held a demonstration supporting those in prison. In Addis one person was killed by a grenade, and police shot and injured 22 others when they fired on a procession by tens of thousands of Orthodox Christians, singing and chanting religious songs in annual celebrations for St. Michael’s Day. 

Runners and a skier — yes, a skier



Robel Teklemariam
photo: Glenwood Springs Post
Independent/ Kara K. Pearson

FOR YEARS Ethiopian and Eritrean distance runners have amazed and enchanted fans at the Olympics, but in February the new Ethiopian Olympic phenom was a skier. Yes, that's right: a skier, as in cross country. As in snow. Robel Teklemariam, a 31-year-old Ethiopian, raced in the 15km cross country classic race in the 2006 Olympics in Turino. For Teklemariam getting on the Italian Alpine course wasn't easy.



Robel crosses the finish line.
photo: Reuters/Kai Pfaffenbach

Teklemariam was born in Addis and came to the United States in 1983 when his mother took a job with the United Nations. Still a kid, he was sent to a boarding school in Lake Placid, New York, site of the 1980 Olympics, where he got hooked on skiing. For high school, he went to Colorado Rocky Mountain School, a

prep school near Aspen in the heart of ski country. At CRMS he made both the Alpine and cross country ski teams. He earned a high school All-American rating which was good enough to help him snag a ski scholarship to the University of New Hampshire. He was once ranked as one of the top 30 collegiate skiers in the United States. After graduation, Teklemariam took a break from competitive skiing, but taught skiing in Colorado.

Friends encouraged Teklemariam to qualify for the Olympics as an Ethiopian skier. But first he had to get

approval from the Ethiopian Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Sport. Skepticism abounded. Teklemariam pressed on. He had to form the Ethiopian Skiing Federation — his brother is conveniently now the vice president, Teklemariam the president — and ultimately the Federation of International Skiing approved Ethiopia as a participant in Turino. As Ethiopia's sole athlete, Teklemariam, grinning broadly, carried the flag during the sparkling Olympic opening ceremony.

But the next day, a complication struck. Teklemariam was one of 12 skiers suspended from competition for five days because blood tests revealed abnormally high red cell counts. Distance runners and skiers are known to take hard-to-detect drugs which increase red cells and thus force more oxygen into their system. But athletes can also have high red blood counts because they have trained at high altitudes. Thus, no drug sanction was lodged against Teklemariam and the other suspended skiers, only a five day "start prohibition," purportedly to protect the skiers' health. Teklemariam's event was beyond the five day limit. He cleared a second blood test and was allowed to compete.

A blizzard struck the cross country course at Pragelato on the day of the race, but 99 skiers started the race. The gold medal winner, Andrus Veerpalu of Estonia, finished in 38 minutes 1.3 seconds. Teklemariam knew that he was unlikely to win a medal, but wanted to put in a credible performance. "I don't want to be a novelty," he said before the race. "I'd love to win, but I'm a realist. I want to race well enough to equal other skiing countries."

He was no novelty. He finished in 84th place, in a credible 48:33, a bit more than 10 minutes behind the leader. But he came across the finish line ahead of competitors from other snow-starved countries such as Rory Morrish of Ireland (88th place) and Phillip Kimely of Kenya (92nd) and Prawat Nagvajara of Thailand (last place).



Robel's fans brave the weather to wave the Ethiopian flag
photo: AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus

A small but noisy knot of supporters waved Ethiopian flags and cheered Teklemariam, as if he were, well, a long distance runner, when he finished. Ethiopia has a new hero.

We haven't forgotten the runners

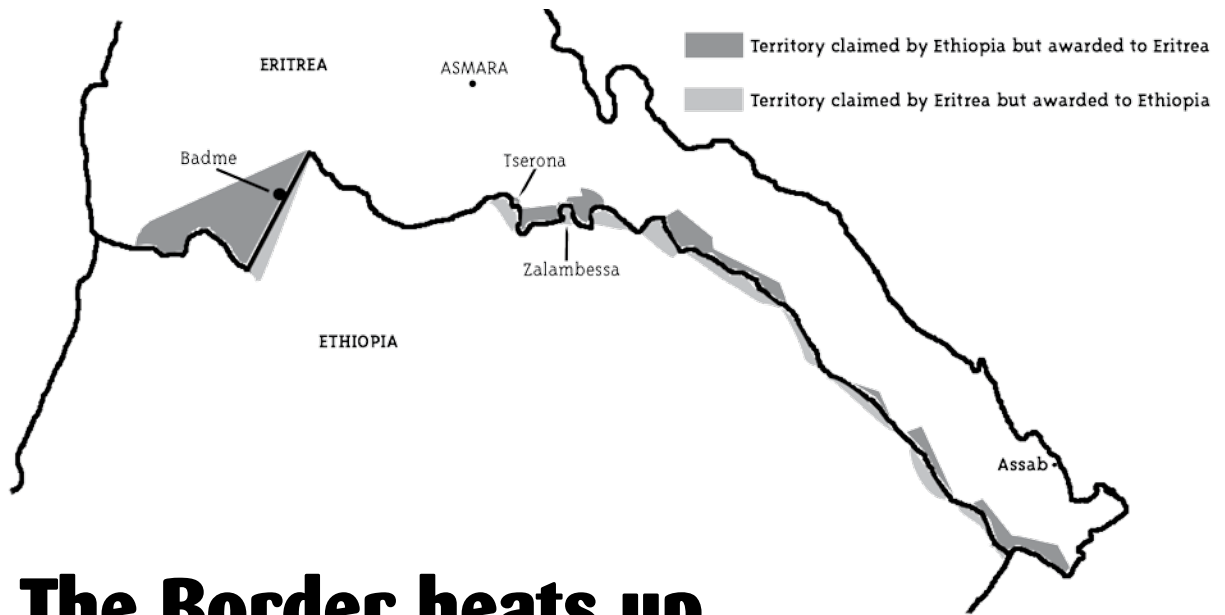
Ethiopian and Eritrean runners continue to do more than just equal the performances of athletes from other countries. In January four-time world champion and two-time Olympic gold medal winner Haile Gebrselassie ran in the Rock 'N' Roll Arizona marathon in Tempe, AZ. His half marathon time of 58:55 on a clear, crisp morning running through the streets of Phoenix, Scottsdale and Tempe broke the mark of 59:16 set by 18-year-old Kenyan Samuel Wanjiru in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, last September 11. That's a new world record. Gebreselassie's 20-kilometer time, also officially clocked, was 55:48. That broke the world record held by his longtime rival, Paul Tergat of Kenya, of 56:18 set in the Stramilano, Italy, half marathon on April 4, 1998.

"This one is so fantastic because this is my first one [record] in America," Gebreselassie said. "It's a little special to me. It's really, really wonderful." The 32-year old Gebreselassie has not run competitively since his fifth place finish in the 10,000 meters during the 2004 Athens Olympics. In Athens he said he was giving up track for marathons. His good showing in Arizona indicates that he will be ready to face his nemesis Tergat in the London Marathon in April.

Younger Ethiopian runners continue to impress as well. In January Kenenisa Bekele, an Olympic gold medalist in Athens, had to pour on the speed during the muddy last 1,000 metres of the Great Edinburgh International Cross Country meeting to beat Qatar's Saif Saaeed Shaheen. *The Scotsman* reported that Shaheen said that all he spotted was a blur to his right as Bekele darted past. Before the Qatari could react, Bekele completed the 9km course in an impressive 26:08. He was welcomed by a crowd of Ethiopians who celebrated their idol's performance in alto voce. "That's the traditional song," Bekele explained to puzzled Scottish reporters. "They are very happy."

The Eritrean cheering section that was following third-placed Zersenay Tadesse was even noisier and more joyous. According to *The Scotsman*, they carried their hero shoulder-high as the flags of the two nations — so often in conflict these days — ruffled colorfully together in the breeze.

Also an impressive winner in Edinburgh was Gelete Burka, Ethiopia's 19-year-old phenomenon. Burka ran with great pace and ease, beating out her countrywoman Tinunesh Dibaba, who was the overwhelming favorite. Burka, the World Junior Champion, was barely winded when she finished the 6k event in 19:01, with the Kenyan Olympic 5000m silver medalist Isabella Ochichi second in 19:12, and Dibaba a distant third in 19:21. Burka had shocked Dibaba by beating her in the 5000m at the Ethiopian championships in October. But in Scotland, Dibaba, who won a unique double in the Helsinki World Championships in August, was undermined by a series of mishaps. Although Dibaba was gracious in defeat, the reporters from the International Association of Athletics Federation web site extracted from her details of a nightmare journey to Edinburgh. She had been delayed by immigration authorities on arrival in London from Addis Ababa. She missed the last flight north for the day. She had to spend the night sleeping on the floor at Heathrow airport, and caught the first flight in the morning. She arrived less than four hours before the race, yet made no complaint. 🏃🏃



The Border heats up

Troops move, tempers flare, the U.N. blusters

by Barry Hillenbrand (*Debre Marcos 63-65*)

LAST SPRING the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which had cost so many lives, wasted so much money and distracted both countries from the more important task of development, appeared to have cooled ever so slightly. Of course the border remained closed. Towns like Zalambessa and Senafe still lacked the bustle of the old trading days. And admittedly there was no love lost between the two sides. No one talked of renewing diplomatic relations.

Still, no one was shooting. The 3,300 U.N. peacekeepers deployed along the border fought off boredom, not threats. Ethiopian President Meles raised hopes of a resolution to the standoff by expressing a willingness "in principle" to accept the findings of the Border Commission which redrew the disputed frontier. Perhaps at long last Ethiopia was ready to accept the new border lines and give up territory long claimed by Eritrea.

But in September, the situation once again took a turn for the worse. When the United Nations Security Council voted a six month extension of its peacekeeping mission, Eritrea reacted strongly. "This resolution is toothless, meaningless, pathetic and

extremely disappointing," Yemane Gebremeskel, the director of Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki's office, told Reuters. Eritrea wants the United Nations — to say nothing of the United States, the European Union and all right-thinking peoples — to pressure Ethiopia into accepting the Boundary Commission's recommendations. The Eritreans want Ethiopia to withdraw its forces from places like the hapless town of Badme, the focal point of the war and now awarded to Eritrea.

Berhane Abrehe, Eritrea's finance minister, went in front of the U.N. General Assembly and came up just short of threatening to ignite the conflict once again. Said Berhane, "I wish to categorically inform the Assembly that Eritrea is determined, and has the right, to defend and preserve its territorial integrity by any means possible. If the United Nations fails to reverse the occupation, it will be equally responsible as Ethiopia is for any renewed armed conflict."

To emphasize its pique against the U.N., Eritrea banned the use of its airspace by helicopters working with the peacekeeping troops along the border. The Security Council responded with a stern warn-

ing to both countries. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan told reporters that if the Boundary Commission ruling had been implemented right after it was issued in 2003, "we wouldn't be here now, but we are [now] caught in a stalemate."

The flight restriction limited the ability of the U.N. to monitor troop movements along the border. Rumors flew. The U.N. said that it had detected both sides moving tanks and troops closer to the border. "We cannot say that the situation is stable," one U.N. official told Reuters. "In some places, large numbers of troops have been moved." Dangerous little incidents threatened to propel the two sides into war. Four Ethiopian soldiers were killed when their vehicle struck a freshly laid mine on the road between Sembel and Badme, the flashpoint in the 1998-2000 war. This is near the TSZ, the Temporary Security Zone, the area along the border set up by the cease-fire agreement. The U.N. continued to call the area "tense and potentially volatile".

In December the Security Council passed a resolution which, in unusually strong language, called for "both parties to show maximum restraint and to refrain from any threat or use of force against each other." The resolution demanded that "both parties return to the 16 December 2004 levels of deployment, beginning with immediate effect and completing this redeployment within 30 days, in order to prevent aggravation of the situation." The Council threatened sanctions if the two countries did not comply.


Keeping up the pressure — and perhaps responding to the Security Council resolution — Eritrea ordered all American, Canadian and European members of the U.N. peacekeeping Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) to leave Eritrea within 10 days. No official reason was given. The expulsion order covered about 160 of UNMEE's 3,794 staff. Annan and the Security Council both issued strong condemnations of the move, calling it "unacceptable" and "inconsistent" with Asmara's U.N. obligations. "The Security Council unequivocally demands that Eritrea immediately reverse its decision without preconditions," said the current Security Council president, British U.N. envoy Emyr Jones Parry.

Eritrea continued to bluster and sent the unwelcome UNMEE members packing. But Ethiopia which had been stonewalling the Boundary Commission decision for more than two years suddenly put on a show of reasonableness. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles told parliament that his government would move troops away from the border. "In respect to the request by the U.N. Security Council and to ease tension along the border, Ethiopia has decided to redeploy troops to their original positions away from the border," Meles said.

The U.N. dispatched two top envoys to calm soaring border tensions. After meetings in Addis, the envoys — Jean-Marie Guehenno, the head of U.N. peacekeeping operations, and military adviser General Randir Kumar Mehta — arrived in Asmara hoping to see top Eritrean officials. No such luck. "So far I have not met with any Eritrean official," Guehenno told a press briefing. "I made very clear that I am available for the Eritrean authorities. I cannot do more than what I have done." According to reports on Eritrea's Information Ministry website, shabait.com, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki was touring the countryside and was not in Asmara. "I think the Eritreans may be taking this too far," a diplomat told Reuters..

However, by mid-January Eritrea drastically reduced the movement of its troops within the buffer zone. The Security Council held off on any action on the matter until February while a high-level United States delegation visited Ethiopia and Eritrea in an attempt to break the deadlock. But the American delegation fared no better than the U.N. group.

Eritrean president Isaias Afewerki continued to insist that Ethiopia comply with the border ruling and refused to allow the U.S. team of diplomats and military officials into Eritrea. The group, led by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer went to Addis, met with President Meles and visited the Ethiopian side of the border. Of the snub by Eritrea, a US official said: "The way we look at it is, it is their loss."

The stalemate continues. 



Ethiopia news

Edited by Barry Hillenbrand

Where's Mengistu?

A Zimbabwe opposition web site (www.newzimbabwe.com) reports that Ethiopia's former military dictator, Mengistu Haile Mariam, has abandoned his Harare home in the plush suburb of Gunhill and is now living in Kariba, near the Zambian border. Mengistu lives in Zimbabwe as a guest of President Robert Mugabe. Intelligence sources reported in October that Mengistu left Harare sometime in July. It was not clear whether the man who once ruled Ethiopia with an iron fist had decided to live in Kariba permanently. He comes back to Harare for visits to a business he owns. Security may be the main reason for the move to the countryside. In 1995, he survived an attempt on his life. His would-be assassin, an Ethiopian, was shot and wounded by Mengistu's bodyguards

"Alta fakedem"

Okay, so it is not as glitzy as the American or British version, but a pop idol is a pop idol, and so is it any surprise that "Ethiopian Idols" is a smash hit on otherwise dull state-run television? The sets are jerry-built and the some of the contestants are just as painfully lacking in talent as those on "American Idol." According to the AP, the show even has its own bad-guy judge like Simon Cowell in the U.S. version. Musician Feleke Hailu's catch phrase — "*alta fakedem*," or "you didn't make it" — may seem positively meek compared to some of Cowell's acerbic reviews. But Feleke has caused a sensation in this tradition-bound culture. "Most of the time I tell the contestants to go back to their old jobs, forget about a career in singing," says Feleke. "Or I tell them that they sing like donkeys." Harsh.

"Sometimes they get angry. The girls burst into tears and a few weeks ago one singer threw a stick at me after I told him that he had failed to get

through to the next round," the 46-year-old saxophonist says. "The problem in our culture is that it is not common to tell the truth or criticize. People cannot take criticism." But they can take the fame, which means that there is no lack of contestants. Some 2,000 tried out for 96 spots on the show which is filmed at a restaurant. Many of the wanna-bes travel from remote cities and towns in Ethiopia to try-out for the show. The winner is decided via a phone-in ballot.

Famine or not

It's difficult to make sense of the food situation in Ethiopia. Reports from the government and several food agencies claim that harvests in Ethiopia have been extremely good this year. The number of Ethiopians in need of food aid in 2006 could be one of the lowest in recent years, says the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network. The agency reported that while millions of Ethiopians require food aid each year, harvests for the coming year are expected to be far higher than last year and above the five-year average.

According to the government's Central Statistics Agency, a record amount of land was planted, surpassing last year's 10 million hectares. High crop prices throughout 2005 have also encouraged farmers to use fertilizers and other methods to increase their yields. Good rains and the absence of pests had also helped.

Yet Famine Early Warning Systems Network said the knock-on effects of years of drought, poor nutrition, bad health care and lack of clean drinking water had left many people vulnerable. "Many people will face chronic food insecurity in 2006 as well as high levels of malnutrition, disease outbreaks, water shortages, sanitation problems, and seed deficits due to the lingering effects of the mul-

tiple shocks they have sustained in recent years,” says the agency.

A report on [www. ReliefWeb.int](http://www.ReliefWeb.int), which has most of the latest reports, shows a more complex picture. Rains were good in the highlands, but less favorable in the dessert regions. A far more alarming report came from the World Food Program which warned that “a humanitarian catastrophe could engulf the drought-stricken Horn of Africa.” The report was attached to a fund appeal by the WFP which said that it needs money to provide emergency food aid for an estimated 5.4 million people.

In collaboration with governments and other partners, WFP raised the alarm in recent months about the worsening impact of drought, especially on pastoral and agro-pastoral communities.

In Ethiopia, says the WFP, initial assessments of the main rain season indicate that approximately 1.5 million pastoralists in the southern Somali region and perhaps an estimated 250,000 in the Borena zone of the Oromiya region will require food assistance from January–June 2006. This is on top of some 5.5 million people already being assisted by WFP through its various operations in Ethiopia.

WFP’s in-country contingency and carry-over stocks of 165,000 tons of food and new contributions for 2006 will be used to cover the needs of these people. In 2005, WFP gave food to more than a million people in the drought-prone Somali region.

Amber waves of teff

A small group of farmers in Kansas are busy with an experiment raising teff on America’s Great Plains. Under a \$197,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Gary and Gil Alexander planted their first teff plots in the spring of 2005 near the northwest Kansas town of Nicodemus, about 300 miles west of Kansas City. Nicodemus is a protected National Historic Park site and one of the last of nearly a dozen towns settled by former black slaves — known locally as Exodusters — who flocked to the fertile Kansas prairie in the late 1870s and early 1880s in search of a better life. The Alexanders who

are distant cousins and descendants of the former slaves who first settled Nicodemus, were both intrigued by the connection teff had with Ethiopia and Africa.

Besides, wheat prices are not so good and the cousins were looking for an alternative crop they could grow that would fill a market niche. Edgar Hicks, a grain marketing consultant in Omaha, approached them with the idea of growing teff. “Teff is a crop grown primarily in Ethiopia, and using the connection between Ethiopia and Nicodemus being a black settlement, we thought teff would be something to try,” Gil Alexander said. Teff’s low gluten content, nutritional qualities, drought resistance and forage benefits added to the cultural ties that first drew Hicks to the crop.

The Alexanders experimented with different varieties. In November Gary Alexander harvested the last of his 2 acres of teff. The test plot was small enough to be cut with hedge trimmers and a small hand scythe. But the black farmers who are growing it to supplement their income do not expect it will ever become a primary crop. “This is wheat country,” Gil Alexander said. “The plains of Kansas have always been wheat country, and I don’t see that changing.”

But still a market may be in the making. In January the Ethiopian government banned the export of grains including teff. The ban was announced as domestic prices have jumped up to 20-percent over the past four months. The cost of a 25-kilo bag of teff has gone from 120 birr to 160 birr, or about from \$14 to \$19 dollars. “Inflated prices on grains may have an impact on the consumer,” said a Ministry of Trade and Industry statement. “The ministry is duty-bound to stabilise the market for the good of public.” And perhaps for the good of the farmers of Nicodemus who may soon be shipping teff to the desperate Ethiopian restaurateurs in places like Washington DC.

Adoption problems

It’s likely that *People* magazine has a more recent update on this, but in August the British newspaper *The Sun* said it had tracked down Mentewab Dawit,

the alleged mother of Angelina Jolie's adopted Ethiopian baby Zahara. Dawit isn't contesting the adoption. No, she thanks Angelina for giving her child an opportunity for a good life. But adoption experts in Ethiopia say that Jolie may have to reapply for the adoption to keep everything on the legal up-and-up. According to *The Sun*, Dawit's grandmother placed the child for adoption and told authorities that her daughter had died during childbirth. That may render the adoption illegal until the mother gives consent.

THE PRESS

Dim record on journalists

In its annual report the Committee to Protect Journalists said that China, Cuba, Eritrea and Ethiopia together account for two-thirds of the 125 editors, writers and photojournalists imprisoned around the world in 2005. That's up from 120 in 2004. "We're disturbed to see the number of jailed journalists rise, and we're particularly troubled that the list of worst abusers now includes Ethiopia and Eritrea." Eritrea has 15 journalists in prison, many for reasons the government has not explained. In December Ethiopia jailed two former newspaper editors and that brought their total to 15 journalists behind bars. The two former editors of Amharic-language weekly newspapers were sentenced for articles published more than six years ago. The group says Getachew Simie was given three months in prison for criminal defamation while Leykun Engeda was sentenced to 15 months for allegedly printing false news.

Bloggers come of age

The BBC reports that the post-election disturbances triggered a blogging surge in Ethiopia. Just over an hour after shots started ringing out in Addis Ababa's crowded Merkato, the first blogger posted the news on line. "I was in a taxi on the way to Central Bus station," wrote one unnamed correspondent. "The driver got stopped, and then the soldiers arrived immediately. They took him out of the cabin. I do not know what he did wrong. They beat and threw him over the police truck."

Fast paced eyewitness accounts of Ethiopia's November unrest did not come from the news wires or even on the BBC News website, but from a small but growing set of citizen journalists — Ethiopia's plucky band of bloggers. Until recently, blogging had barely registered in sub-Saharan Africa, but in the past few months, the Ethiopian blogging scene has started to blossom.

The seismic political events that have taken place since the May elections acted as a powerful recruiting sergeant for the blogging community. In recent months, the stalwarts of the Ethiopian blogging world — chief among them ethiopundit (ethiopundit.blogspot.com) — have been joined by a whole range of online upstarts, among them Weichegud! ET Politics (weichegud.blogspot.com), Satisfy My Soul [Ego] (egoportal.blogspot.com) and Friends of Ethiopia (friendsofethiopia.blogspot.com), all of whom use the conveniently free and anonymous Blogger platform for their online musings.

BUSINESS/ECONOMY

Computer plant for Debre Zeit

The Get Eshet Industrial Site, a private company in Debre Zeit, announced that it has finalized a deal to establish a computer manufacturing factory at a cost of 100 million birr. The project will be a joint operation with the Chinese entrepreneurs. The factory will supply personal computers to other African countries and employ around 400 workers.

Oil exploration

The Chinese petroleum company Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPAEB) will start drilling the first exploratory well in the Gambela basin in western Ethiopia in February. The area covers 7,451 square miles near the Sudanese border. ZPAEB is working under contract with Petronas, the Malaysian company which has an agreement with the Ethiopian Ministry of Mines and Energy to explore in the Gambela concession. ZPAEB is importing a well-drilling rig and other equipment. The road that will be used to transport the machines to the Gambela concession has already been paved. The contractor hopes to finish the drilling work on

the first exploratory well during Gambela's four-month long the dry season. The cost of the drilling is estimated at \$15 to \$16 million. The American oil company, Chevron, conducted gravity and magnetic surveys in the Gambela basin in 1983.

Petronas also signed a 4-year exploration deal with Ethiopia to look for oil in a 35,907-square mile area in the Ogaden near the border with Somalia. Petronas will invest at least \$15 million in startup funding and Ethiopia will receive unspecified royalties if oil is found.

The Ogaden National Liberation Front said in a statement that as long as the people of the region are not allowed to choose their own government "the exploitation of natural resources in Ogaden for the benefit of the Ethiopian regime or any foreign firm will not be tolerated." The Ethiopian Oil Ministry said that the exploration would benefit the Somali region's people, one of the poorest in Ethiopia. "The world no longer tolerates terrorist groups," said Abiy Hunegnaw, head of petroleum operations at the Mines Ministry.

Port search

Because it lost both Massawa and Assab to Eritrea in the war, Ethiopia, now a land-locked nation, is busy looking for alternative ports. The situation has become more pressing after Eritrea closed Assab to Ethiopia after the 1998 round of hostilities. Since then, Ethiopia has been dependent on the Djibouti port, 560 miles east of Addis Ababa. Ethiopia's annual cargo traffic at Djibouti port totals over 4.8 million tons, 83 percent of the total cargo traffic at the port. "Ethiopians are our most important customers," says Abduorahman Elmi Ismael, resident representative of the Djibouti port in Addis. In a bid to enhance the capacity of the port, the government of Djibouti began the construction of a fuel depot at Duraleh, four miles from the existing port, at a cost of \$150 million. This project is the first phase of the multimillion dollar port development project.


But the Ethiopian government doesn't seem comfortable with its dependency on Djibouti port alone and in recent years has been looking for alterna-

tives. Ethiopian authorities have favorably assessed the viability of the Somaliland port of Berbera, located 600 miles east of Addis. Somaliland declared independence from the rest of Somalia in 1990, but so far the international community, including the African Union and the United Nations, has not recognized the self-declared state. But this problem has not deterred Somaliland from maintaining good diplomatic and trade relations with Ethiopia. Ethiopian Airlines is the only international airline that regularly flies to Somaliland's capital, Hargeisa. Ethiopian commercial banks work with the bank of Somaliland. Ethiopian ministers held a series of meetings with their counterparts in Somaliland on the possibilities that Ethiopia could use the Berbera port. In February 2005 Haile Assegedie, the Minister of State for Infrastructure, ordered state enterprises to import goods through Berbera.

Last November a Pakistani shipping-line company, PIL, brought the first Ethiopian shipment to Berbera for the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation. "Ethiopian officials went to Berbera to see the arrival. And they were happy with the safe delivery of the cargo, which was transported to Addis Ababa by trucks," says Abdurazak, Chargé d'Affaires of Somaliland in Ethiopia.

HEALTH

Measles outbreak

At least 34 people have died of measles in the last five months in southeastern and eastern Ethiopia. There are fears that the disease could spread further as people in drought-hit areas migrate to other places seeking food and water. UNICEF blames the initial outbreaks on low immunization levels. More than 370 cases of measles and 20 deaths were reported from July to December 2005 in Afar. In the Somali region there were 195 cases, 14 of them fatal. UNICEF said that nearly 13 million Ethiopian children will be inoculated countrywide this year in a bid to curtail such outbreaks. 

Obelisk update

Lots of talk, little action

THE AXUM OBELISK NOW LIVES under a tin roof, but it still continues to draw the visitors to the city. Journalists are making the trek north from Addis hoping to write stories about the newly returned Axum obelisk standing proudly in the ancient town. But they are disappointed. "The dismembered obelisk," reports Emily Wax of the *Washington Post*, "still waits in two metal sheds, covered with blankets and a tarp, while residents debate how much of the present they are willing to disturb in order to recover Ethiopia's distant past." The still unsolved problem is what to do about recently discovered tombs and other ancient buildings located under the area where the obelisk was to be re-erected. In September Culture Minister Teshome Toga told Reuters that Ethiopia, UNESCO and Italy, which is funding the project, had agreed that the placement of the obelisk can go ahead without harming the tombs. "If all goes well and according to plan, it is possible the re-erection of the obelisk could be completed by the end of 2005," he said.

But all did not go well. So journalists making New Years visits had to be content with interviews with residents expressing their continued joy at the obelisk's return and with Italian officials saying that Ethiopian-Italian relations have benefited

from their magnanimous — if somewhat belated — return of war plunder. The Italians, victims of art thieves and plunderers themselves, even suggested that perhaps others nations will begin returning stolen or misplaced art treasures to their rightful owners. The Ethiopians took the opportunity to raise questions about historical items taken by the British at the end of the 19th Century.

A group of heavy-weight and very serious archeologists, mostly Germans, arrived in Axum in January to mark the centenary of the expedition to the city by German archaeologist Enno Littmann. The 1906 expedition team unearthed the tomb of Emperor Kaleb, a 4th century ruler of the Axumite Kingdom. Littmann's journey sparked an interest in Ethiopian archeology throughout Europe at the time. This January a six-day international Littmann Conference at Axum began with the laying of a cornerstone for a 2-kilometer street named after Littmann. Then scholars from Germany, Japan, the United States and Ethiopia settled down to debate scholarly papers about Ethiopian history and archeology.

As for the obelisk, it remains in its shed. But it will rise again. Watch this space. 🇪🇹🇮🇹



Eritrea news

Edited by Barry Hillenbrand



USAID ejected

The Eritrean government, in an action which surprised and dismayed aid officials, ordered the office of USAID closed. Woldai Futur, minister for development told AFP in August that the government's decision was "irreversible." He contended that "we are uncomfortable with the operations of the USAID office in Asmara." He declined to explain exactly what he meant by "uncomfortable." He said that "we want a much stronger and more focused relationship in development with the government of the U.S.A." He added: "There are other avenues apart from USAID where cooperation can flourish. There are a lot of countries where USAID doesn't operate."

A visit by a US delegation led by Donald Yamamoto, the deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs, could not change the government's decision. Government newspapers said that "the non-resolution of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border issue is negatively affecting the necessary cooperation between Eritrea and the United States." Eritrea has long contended that the U.S. favors Ethiopia in the border conflict.

While much of the food aid the U.S. sends to Eritrea comes through funding by USAID or the Department of Agriculture, it is disturbed by the UN World Food Program. "We are reasonably confident that donations to WFP will not be affected in the short to medium term," said Jean-Pierre Cebon, WFP Country Director in Eritrea. Minister Woldai Futur told Reuters that he hoped that booting USAID out would not affect the delivery of food aid that amounted to 774,679 metric tonnes of food over the last five years.

Smoking ban

In August Eritrea posted tough new anti-smok-

ing regulations. Tobacco advertising was banned, smoking is now barred "in enclosed, indoor areas of any private or public work place, or any public place" with the exception of bars and nightclubs licensed to sell alcohol on their premises. The health ministry estimates that 7.2% of Eritrean adults smoke daily, according to a survey carried out in 2004.

Preserving heritage sites

Alarmed by the findings contained in a report issued by the New York-based World Monuments Fund released in June 2004, Eritrean authorities are seeking funds to preserve its rich architectural heritage. "Our aim is to rehabilitate all the cultural assets in Eritrea," said Gabriel Tzeggai of Eritrea's Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project, which oversees restoration projects on the three WMF-identified sites. "Rehabilitation requires you to be very careful," he told AFP. "It will take time. We not only need funds but also technical assistance. We need guidelines and a management plan."

The rehabilitation work will be the first of its kind in Eritrea. The country's myriad social and economic problems are usually seen as more pressing than architectural restoration. According to the WMF, Asmara boasts one of the world's highest concentrations of early modern architecture, most of it built during the Italian occupation. "The urban fabric of Asmara's city center represents a bold attempt to create a Utopian city based on modernist planning and architectural ideals," the report said. "The fusion of European modernism with African highland culture resulted in a unique urban environment that has survived remarkably intact." More than 400 buildings — representing such varied styles as Novecento, Neo-classicism, Neo-Baroque, Futurism and Rationalism — remain from that period, but almost all are now in danger from development and decay.

At the same time, similar threats to heritage exist in the Red Sea port of Massawa, where numerous fortifications and the governor's palace dating from the Ottoman Empire as well as a 16th-century Mosque are threatened. "Since 1991, little has been

done to restore the city's historic buildings," the WMF report said. Damage was also done by bombings during the Eritrean independence struggle. "Structures that have survived are now in danger of collapse," said the report. "Others have been razed to make way for new development."

Another structure listed by the WMF as threatened is the medieval Orthodox Kidane-Mehret Church near Senafe. Its roof collapsed nearly a decade ago. "The surviving roof beams are rotting, paintings on interior pillars are deteriorating and the building's structural integrity has been compromised," says the WMF report. Emergency repair work would take a full year and cost at least \$100,000, but government funding is severely limited, according to Gabriel. The WMF report has thus far sparked donations totaling only \$9,000.

Demands to free imprisoned journalists

In September the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called on Eritrea, the worst jailer of journalists in Africa, to account for 15 journalists who have been held since the government closed down all private media and independent reporting in a crackdown in September 2001.

"Holding these journalists incommunicado without due process is a gross violation of human rights," said Ann Cooper, CPJ Executive Director. "We have not forgotten those brave journalists who continue to languish in Eritrea's secret jails and our hearts go out to their families at this difficult time." Some of the journalists were charged with failing to put in time in national service. But others are held without charge and have virtually disappeared into secret prisons, claims the CPJ.

In November one of the 15 imprisoned journalists, Dawit Isaac, who holds dual Swedish-Eritrean citizenship, was briefly released from prison. He called his wife who lives in Stockholm and for a moment there was talk that Eritrea was relaxing its press controls. But Isaac was re-arrested two days later. The government claimed that he was released for medical reasons and simply returned to prison after treatment.

The California-based Eritrean opposition news service, Gedab News, reported in December that Jimie Kimeil, a journalist who worked for *Eritrea Al-Hadeetha*, the state-owned Arabic newspaper, was arrested in Asmara in November. A veteran of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, the forerunner to the PFDJ, Eritrea's current ruling party, Jimie Kimiel had been working as the paper's sports editor since 1992.

Eritrea plans a free trade zone

Eritrea hopes to open a free trade zone which would allow it to grow its economy. Reuters reported that government officials said that the planned free port, in the coastal city of Massawa, would offer tax exemptions and potential access to markets in neighbors Sudan and Ethiopia. But much would depend on whether Eritrea can re-open trade relations and tap into the healthy growth in both nations despite political tensions. Eritrea's borders have been closed for nearly two years and relations with Ethiopia are as tense as ever.

In December Sudanese officials said they would discuss re-opening the border closed after Khartoum accused Eritrea of backing rebels operating in the eastern part of the country. "Operations will start step by step, hopefully in the first half of 2006," Araia Tseggai, chief executive officer of the Eritrea Free Zones Authority. Araia acknowledged that nearby free trade areas in Djibouti and Aden in Yemen, would pose competition, but said Eritrea's location was its best advantage.

"The eastern part of Sudan is much closer to Massawa than it is to Port Sudan," Araia said. "When peace comes with Ethiopia, much of Ethiopia is closer to Massawa than other ports such as Mombasa."

The economies in both Sudan and Ethiopia are showing considerably more growth than Eritrea's, which grew only 1.8 per cent compared with 11.6 per cent growth in Ethiopia. Yet Eritrea shows little sign that it intends to shift its economic policy and loosen its tight control on business and industry.



Web links to try

THE WEB IS LOADED WITH SITES filled with stories and items about Ethiopia and Eritrea. Some are from newspapers, radio and even TV. The BBC is always interesting and reliable. Other sites are run by the members of the Ethiopian/Eritrean diaspora.

One of the best news portal is <http://www.nazret.com>. Another good news page, which used to be called Ben's News Page is: <http://www.ethiopiafirst.com/news1.html>. And a general African news page with a good Ethiopian coverage is: <http://allafrica.com/ethiopia/>. You can also find good Eritrean news on AllAfrica.com. For strictly Eritrean news try: <http://news9.asmarino.com/> which is a bi-lingual site and sometimes a bit tricky to navigate. Also <http://www.awate.com/> has Eritrean news, but is run by folks from the Eritrean opposition. Indeed, all these sites carry some baggage and should be read with a critical eye.

Here are some interesting recent stories which are worth looking up on the Web — and elsewhere.

Ethiopia

Four star bathrooms

Marc Lacey, a *New York Times* correspondent based in Africa wrote a wonderfully amusing story about *Fortune* magazine, an Addis-based economic magazine, which runs restaurant reviews which not only award stars for the quality of food, but also — and this is the point of Lacey's story — for the level of sanitation found in the bathrooms. A great read at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/15/international/africa/15ethiopia.html>.

The *NYTimes* has become more difficult and more expensive to access. The current day's paper is usually available free and sometimes you can work back to older stories. But to have full access to NYT's archives, you must register for Times Select. Subscribers get this free after a complex registration. Others have to pay a monthly fee.

No bathrooms

The New York Times may have a thing about bathrooms. Sharon LaFraniere wrote a story about the problems girls face in African schools because of the lack of bathrooms reserved for females. This is a serious story datelined Balizenda, Ethiopia. It can be found at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/23/international/africa/23ethiopia.html?pagewanted=all>

Addis portrait

A good, although now slightly dated, story by Lacey, who is an excellent reporter formerly based in Washington, is found at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/14/international/africa/14ethiopia.html?pagewanted=all>

Trouble in Ethiopia

National Public Radio does not cover Ethiopia often, but when it does NPR provides excellent reports. Two NPR stories can be heard at:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5067548&ft=1&f=17>

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5068762>

Politics and power

The BBC web site runs a great deal on Ethiopia. Most interesting are some of their audio reports, such as a Radio 4 report from Addis and an interview with a minister who had visited Prime Minister Meles. Check out:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/monday.shtml>

A wonderfully interesting little BBC report is about two ministers from the Mengistu government who have been unwanted guests in the Italian embassy since May 1991. It can be found at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4565376.stm>

An useful and detailed report on the prospects for a digital high tech revolution in Ethiopia appeared in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper. A very good read at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/online/story/0,3605,1541785,00.html>

A farewell talk

US Ambassador to Ethiopia Aurelia E. Brazeal left her post this summer after three years on the job. In a speech before she departed, Brazeal admitted that baby boomers like herself were optimists and that she had "a passionate belief in the power of positive change." As the first American woman to serve as ambassador to Ethiopia she was impressed with the positive roles women played in Ethiopian society. Incidentally Brazeal was followed by another woman who is serving temporarily as the current top officer at Embassy. She is Ambassador Vicki Huddleston who served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Peru. The full text of Brazeal's talk — and other Embassy documents — can be found at:

http://addisababa.usembassy.gov/amb_speech082305.html

Eritrea

The Eritrean economy

A good article by Ravinder Rena, an assistant professor of economics at the Eritrea Institute of Technology, on the problems and prospects of the Eritrean economy can be found in, of all places, *The Middle East Times*. The site:

<http://www.metimes.com/articles/normal.php?StoryID=20060120-042913-90281>

Eritrea in Slate

Eritrea does not get the coverage in the foreign media that Ethiopia does. In part this is because it is a small country which does not generate a lot of news. And it is a country which has made it difficult for foreign journalist to get visas to visit or take up residence. But from time to time, journalists come through and file lengthy reports. Tom Downey, a freelance writer who has published travel and po-

litical pieces in the *New York Times* magazine and *National Geographic*, wrote a three part series on Eritrea for Slate (slate.com).

Downey visited Eritrea seven years ago when the country was full of hope and possibilities. Now, he says, "what a difference those seven years have made. This African renaissance is now over. They've sunk back into the dark ages. Eritrea has been dealt one of the cruelest hands in Africa. First there was brutal oppression at the hands of Italian colonists. Then there was a bloody struggle against Ethiopia. Now there is the specter of a homegrown despot, intent on retaining power even when that means driving his nation to ruin." His three-part report can be found at: <http://www.slate.com/id/2124967/> or got to Slate.com and type in Eritrea in the search box. It's worth your time.

Debate over aid

Last year Eritrea decided to close the offices of USAID. Although the government was never very clear about the reason, the implication was that the agency interfered too much in Eritrean internal affairs. In July 2005, Gebreselassie Y. Tesfamichael, an economist and former finance minister of Eritrea, wrote a long op-ed piece for the *Washington Post* arguing that what Africa needed was the tools and not advice. He dismissed the false paternalism of the donor-client relationship that places conditions on aid. He said that much of what Eritrea has accomplished since independence has been done on its own. Powerful words. Worth a look. At:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/22/AR2005072202226.html>

The aid conundrum

A similar tough love approach to aid was put forward by Paul Theroux in an op-ed piece in the

New York Times in December. He starts his piece, thusly: "There are probably more annoying things than being hectored about African development by a wealthy Irish rock star in a cowboy hat, but I can't think of one at the moment." Theroux, a former PCV in Malawi, says that "The impression that Africa is fatally troubled and can only be saved by outside help — not to mention celebrities and charity concerts — is a destructive and misleading conceit." He argues that sending Peace Corps teachers to Malawi only dissuaded the country from developing its own corps of teachers. Theroux is a persuasive writer and his conclusions troubling. Full text (which may require a paying for Times Select) can be found on:

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D05E1DF1530F930A15751C1A9639C8B63>

In print

Lovely Ethiopia

Finally some impressive pictures of Ethiopia and Eritrea can be found at:

<http://www.etiopiainmagica.it/>

And in the *National Geographic*, October 2005, there's a big spread on the Danakil Desert and the Afar people who wander through Djibouti, Eritrea & Ethiopia, not recognizing borders. Not on the web as far as we could find. Best enjoyed the old fashioned way, on paper in the magazine. Check your local library or doctor's office.



Book Reviews

Bond Without Blood

A History of Ethiopian and New World Black Relations, 1896-1991

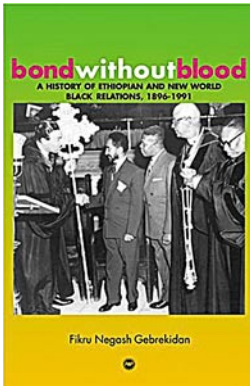
by Fikru Negash Gebrekidan

Africa World Press, 2005

277 pages

\$29.95 (paperback)

Reviewed by William Seraile (Mekele 63-65)



THIS BOOK PROMISES to “construct the narrative of the Ethio-Atlantic ties with three interwoven themes in mind: pan-African nationalism, repatriation, and cultural cross fertilization.” The year 1896 was a pivotal year in modern Ethiopian history as the so-called “primitive” African nation provided Italy with a humiliating defeat in the battle of Adwa. The author describes the victory as one that “signified an imminent racial resurgence, and [Ethiopia] became henceforth an icon of African independence and a source of racial reassurance.”

Interestingly, when I visited Adwa while a Volunteer in Mekele I saw no evidence of the battle’s historical significance. There were no monuments nor any citations to show that this was the location of Ethiopia’s greatest military victory. My extensive research into African American newspapers indicate that the victory was completely unreported in extant newspapers. Nevertheless, the word of victory did inspire some to emigrate to Ethiopia. Paris-based Haitian poet and intellectual Benito Sylvain visited the African nation in 1897 and again in 1903. Accompanying him on his second visit was William Henry Ellis, a black American who hoped to establish an African American colony in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia became better known after Mussolini invaded the country in 1935. Denunciations of the invasion and the brutality used in suppressing resistance came from many citizens of the world, but the greatest outcry came from African Americans and West Indians who formed many ad hoc Ethiopian defense groups. In the United States, an umbrella organization, the United Aid for Ethiopia, was formed in 1936 to lobby the American govern-

ment to support the Ethiopian cause. While this proved fruitless, the black press stirred up great interest in the Italian invasion and occupation. American law forbade citizens to fight for a foreign country against a nation with which the United States was at peace. Still, a few Americans managed to get to Africa to support the resistance. Among them was a flamboyant aviator, Herbert Julian, who managed to destroy one of the nation’s three airplanes in a reckless aerial display.

There was tremendous Caribbean support for the emperor because many believed that Haile Selassie, the former Ras Tefari Makonnen, was a deity. They viewed his 1930 coronation as the fulfillment of the biblical prophesy that a prince would come out of Egypt and Ethiopia. They asserted that Revelations 5: 2–5 referred to the emperor: “And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice: who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals? . . . The lion of the tribe of Judah . . . has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

The inevitability of Italian occupation during the period of the late 1930s led to a decline in African American interest in Ethiopia. The decline continued in following decades as the emergence of the civil rights movement in the United States and the West African independence movement garnered greater interest. West Indian interest in Ethiopia, however, continued to grow. The formation of the Ethiopian World Federation, Inc., founded by Melaku Emmanuel Bayen, a relative of Selassie, had twenty-seven chapters by 1940.

Gebrekidan’s study touches on the Eritrean situation that became a source of contention after the British removed the Italians in 1941. Eritrea was reunited with Ethiopia but chafed under a system that had Amhara administrators in Asmara. The Eritrean Liberation Movement was started in 1961 to overthrow Amhara dominance. On several occasions in Mekele, where I was station from September 1963 to July 1965, I witnessed anti-government sentiment. A school administrator referred to the lowering of the Ethiopian flag as the lowering of the “rag.” In Asmara, anti-government citizens took exception to my Amharic and questioned why

I would speak “a dirty language.” In Tesseni, a clerk in a hotel upon hearing me speak Amharic demanded to know if I was an Amhara. She smiled upon hearing my reply that I was an American.

The most interesting section in the book is Chapter 7, Movement of the Jah People, which describes the migration of blacks to Ethiopia. In 1947, James and Helen Piper migrated to Ethiopia with a petition requesting permission to resettle three hundred individuals including those with mechanical skills. Haile Selassie provided five hundred acres between the Malkoda River and the outskirts of Shasemene. The former personal estate of the emperor became the home of Rastafarians in 1955 and remains to this day the home of returnees.

I can readily identify with the excitement of those from the United States and the Caribbean who went to Ethiopia. I stepped off the plane on September 11, 1963 thrilled to be in Africa. Instead of resting after an early morning arrival from Athens, I immediately started to walk around Addis Ababa. Upon seeing a well dressed Ethiopian, I asked in Amharic “where is the market?” He replied in English “speak English.” This stranger, happy to meet a long lost “cousin,” took me to a home of friends where on Ethiopian New Year’s Day I had my first meal of injera and wat.

West Indians remain interested in Ethiopia because some Reggae employ Amharic lyrics and the missionary work of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Caribbean has kept the African nation in their thoughts.

Interestingly, the author virtually ignores the role of the Peace Corps in Ethiopia. His only reference is to the “miniskirt riot” of 1968 when a Volunteer’s effort to have female students wear the latest European fashions was disrupted by male students who considered this attire immodest. Many students were taught about democracy by their Peace Corps teachers which may have influenced them to engage later in anti-government protests. Upon hearing my lecture on the French revolution in 1964, a student asked me if Haile Selassie was a dictator. Many Ethiopians believed after the ousting of the

Peace Corps that Volunteers were CIA operatives, a viewpoint that I heard several times when I told Ethiopians that I had served in the Peace Corps. This book is interesting but may be of limited appeal to former Volunteers because much of the narrative — despite its title — depicts Ethiopian history and politics with limited coverage of the connection between New World blacks and Ethiopia.

William Seraile is Professor of American History at Lehman College, The Bronx. His most recent book is Bruce Grit: The Black Nationalist Writings of John Edward Bruce.

The Chains of Heaven

An Ethiopian Romance

by Philip Marsden

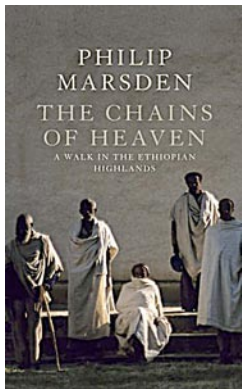
Harper/Collins, 2005

298 pages

£10.49, presently available only in the UK, but can easily be purchased via Amazon.co.uk

*Reviewed by Judith Nordblom Alger
(Asmara 63–65)*

BRITISH AUTHOR PHILIP MARSDEN is best known for his books on Armenia and religious re-birth in Russia. He confesses that he is drawn to “remote and restive minorities and the passionate fringes of religious belief.” Now he has turned his attention to Ethiopia. He first visited Ethiopia in the early 1980s and claims that his experiences at that time had a deep impact on his life. He felt that he needed to go back again to continue what he calls his search. When he returned a few years ago, he walked — pilgrims always walk, he explains — from Lalibela to Axum to visit the world’s largest collection of rock-hewn churches. His pilgrimage led him to reflect on Ethiopian history, the uniqueness of its Christianity and its world-view and the way Ethiopia has played on the imagination of Europeans.



The book's title refers to the chains that help visitors climb to the top of the island of cliffs that is Abba Salama in Tigre. The British scholar David Buxton says that the monastery of Abba Salama "must be one of the most inaccessible in the world." To get there, "it is necessary to follow an extremely narrow ledge lacking handholds of any kind which cuts across a tremendous precipice. The visitor must then ascend a chimney and then clutch a bundle of chains which enable him to surmount the final cliff-face."

In his travels Marsden learns the importance of the concept of *samenna worq*, wax and gold, to Ethiopian culture. Traditional singers (*azmari*) perform songs with a surface meaning (the wax) accessible to most but with a deeper, perhaps analogical, meaning (the gold) which has to be learned. In that spirit, Marsden uses the "chains of heaven" as both wax, the actual chains and the physical climb to Abba Salama, and gold, the struggle one goes through spiritually to reach a higher level.

Marsden also sees the concept of *samenna worq* as a possible key to Ethiopia thought and also as a way to organize his book. Every event, relic, saint or ruler can be seen as Westerners would see them: something to write about factually. But Marsden also looks at things as Ethiopians would see them, as take-off points for some lesson or eternal tale. The saint Tekla Haymanot lost his leg because he prayed standing for twenty years. King Zara Yaqob wrote a number of tender and affecting prayers but was also a vicious and paranoid tyrant. The monks are the heroes of the war between the world and the spirit.

Marsden explains that because Jerusalem is where the first Menelik went to claim his birthright, Lalibela became a "biblical land in miniature. Here is Golgotha, Cana and Nazareth. Beneath Calvary is the Tomb of Adam. I had skirted the slopes of Mount Tabor, Mount Sinai crossed the River Jordan and climbed the Mount of Olives. In the compound of Beta Maryam, I had bent to smell the single rosebush from the Garden of Eden. Beside the church of Beta Giorgis is a slope of un-dug rock which is Mount Ararat."

One can see ambiguity or layered reality in the present world. Comments made about the Derg vary from "it helped" to "it was bad." One Derg collaborator tried to tell Marsden that his situation was "complicated," not necessarily one to be judged as good or evil.

The questions he asked about the quality of life under different rulers were answered by "things really don't change," or "studying history is for people in the cities." You get the feeling that the present world is a continuation of the one established by Menelik I and the saints. In that way, Ethiopia seems to be a country for which time is not linear but cyclical "where dawn rolled round to dusk and dusk rolled round to dawn, where fast led to holy day and holy day to fast, and everyone knew that the famine would give way to feast and feast would give way to famine and the lives of the saints were eternally present."

Marsden cites Donald Levine's *Wax and Gold*, which became something of a training manual for Ethiopia II's at UCLA in 1963. Marsden notes that Levine held that because of its celebration of ambiguity *samenna worq* is an obstacle to material progress in Ethiopia. But Marsden makes no judgment as to whether or not Levine is correct. At first I wondered why Marsden would say nothing about this important issue, but then I realized that his purpose in writing the book was not to make political or ideological statements but to enjoy the telling of this Ethiopian "romance."

Why is it that throughout history Europeans have been intrigued by Ethiopia? Marsden suggests that it is certainly because Ethiopia was a Christian country surviving beyond the Muslim sphere and that it might aid Europeans in its struggle against aggressive Muslims. Also Ethiopia represents the kind of original Christianity many believe is being lost the rush towards rational, liberal thought. The use of animals in the wall paintings, which are allegorical but also a lot of fun to contemplate, was frowned upon by northern Christians. Also worth pondering is the *kebbaro*, the big drum that calls people to prayer, and which seems to reach down to the deepest places in a person's soul, the place

that can be a bit scary for those who avoid the other side of the line from the material world. the point I think Marsden makes is that in traditional Ethiopia there is no line.

At the end of his walk, Marsden writes of a "strange feeling welling inside me. It was a sense of dislocation so intense that before long I couldn't remember how I had got here, or where I was." And there he ends the book. But what does this statement mean about his quest? I cannot figure out what he means, and he makes no further comment. All I have been able to think about is the content of my feelings of incompleteness about the book.

Marsden writes beautifully. He is very funny. He talks of the mules needing hay, his Ethiopian companions needing *tella*, and one companion needing his shoes fixed. But all Marsden wanted was a banana. He includes the story of Menelik II learning to drive a Siddeley auto brought in by Mr. Bentley despite the advice from Menelik's ministers that it would blow up. He adds some really good historical material on Ethiopian theology and the Book of Enoch, a copy of which was brought out of Ethiopia a few hundred years ago. And there are other tidbits I was surprised I did not know.

But he mentions the smell of berbere only once and includes it with dung and dirt. He never writes about Ethiopian food and really never describes the awesome lyrical beauty of the mountains and the physical beauty of the people. He left me feeling that the results of his quest were personal and therefore detached from any strong identification with Ethiopia. He says that "there is no place like Ethiopia." What does that mean? Those of us who see Ethiopia as our second country and who have attached part of our souls to the place would have wondered at him. I guess I would like to know if this trip is it for him, or whether he will go back again and again.

Maybe I am too demanding of Marsden and perhaps I have been gone from there too long. But still I recommend the book because by nature I recommend any book on Ethiopia.

Judith Nordblom Alger now lives in Santa Fe, NM, where she is involved with the Council for International Relations and participates in a monthly outreach group at St. John's College. She is also a docent at the Museum of International Folk Art.

Sweetness in the Belly

by Camilla Gibb

Penguin Press, 2006

352 pages

\$23.95

Reviewed by John Coyne (Addis Ababa 62–64)

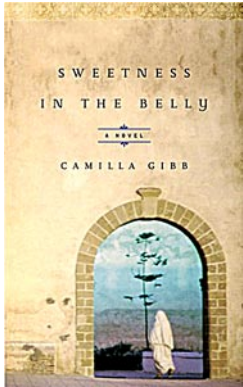
SWEETNESS IN THE BELLY, the new novel by Canadian writer Camilla Gibb, comes to America with a lot of advance praise and awards. It was short-listed for the Canadian Giller Prize, chosen as one of the Toronto *Globe & Mail's* Best Books of 2005, and selected by Amazon.ca for its Best Books of '05 list. The novel is being published in the United States by Penguin Press in March of 2006.

The Literary Review of Canada said of it, "Camilla Gibb has created a novel that is culturally sensitive, consummately researched and deeply compassionate. Her writing is fluid, visceral, vivid and even, never resorting to sensationalism or sentimentality."

Part of the text from the flap of the Canadian edition describes the book this way: "Gibb's haunting narrative takes us seamlessly on a journey between these two distinct worlds: the ancient walled city of Harar and the racially charged atmosphere of 1980s London. Lilly's story is laced with longing and regret, but above all hope — hope that time and love can heal the rifts of her turbulent past. Camilla Gibb has pulled off an astounding feat: never has the distinct and troubled history of this corner of Ethiopia been told with such humanity, warmth, clarity, and grace."

CORRECTION: In *The Herald* #30, the nom de plume of Virginia Mekkelson (Asmara 68–70), author of *The Christmas Contest* was incorrect. It is Valentina Gilbert.

So, we might ask: Who is this Canadian woman? And what does her novel have to do with Ethiopia/Eritrea and RPCVs? Good questions all.



First, some background on Camilla Gibb.

She was born in London and grew up in Toronto where she attended the University of Toronto. She discovered Ethiopia in 1989 during her junior year abroad at the American University in Cairo where she began studying Islam, not as a believer, but a scholar. When she returned to the University of Toronto she met an Ethiopian refugee student, an Oromo, who became a close friend. From her, Gibb first learned about Ethiopian history and the story of contemporary Ethiopia.

After graduation, Gibb went to Oxford for her advance studies, thinking she might travel to the Sudan to do further research in Islam. But at Oxford she met Ethiopian students who told her about Harar, the ancient, walled Muslim city that many of us know from our Peace Corps tour. Gibb did two years of archival research about the Ethiopian Empire before traveling to Ethiopia. When she arrived in Addis Ababa the first person she met was from Harar. He had done his Master's degree at Oxford, and welcomed Gibb telling her, "You'll go and live with my family." Which is precisely what she did. Gibb lived at first with her new friend's uncle and aunt, and later, with cousins of theirs, and their nine children, in their household compound.

While she had gone to Ethiopia as a social anthropologist doing research for her Ph.D., she realized that to tell the story of the Harari community and Islam properly, she had to write a novel. She wanted her book to correct Western misconceptions of Islam. She did that by telling the story of one woman's search for love and belonging in the midst of political upheaval. No easy task for any novelist.

Now the book itself.

The plot involves the story of Lilly, a white woman who as a child is orphaned after her hippy parents die in North Africa. Raised by a Muslim cleric, she eventually finds herself in Harar in 1970–74, a time when the Empire is crumbling and the silent

revolution has begun. Here she meets Dr. Aziz who becomes the love of her life.

The novel opens in Margaret Thatcher's London where Lilly is living with Ethiopian refugees, sharing their lives as she longs for Ethiopia and her lost love. This first-person story alternates between Lilly's grim existence as a nurse in Britain and her painful coming of age in Harar.

In this her third novel, Gibb has a great eye for detail. There is, for example, one striking scene early in the book when she first meets Dr. Aziz after a female circumcision has gone wrong and he attends to the victim. "I could not watch, although he was swift and efficient and there was no more blood than what I had already seen each morning. He re-stitched the wound with surgical thread, leaving a hole much bigger than the size of a matchstick at the end."

While half of the book is placed within the walls of Harar, Camilla Gibb is not drawn to the city's architecture as much as she is fascinated by Islam. An explanation of Islam is the driving motif of the book. Gibb is not a Muslim. "I don't have a spiritual commitment of any kind," she said recently in an interview. "My understanding of Islam is much more intellectual than it is emotional, but I have studied it and I understand how important it is to people and how it shaped their lives. One thing I hoped to achieve in this book was to complicate our understanding of Islam and show that it's not as simplistic as people often think."

Gibb writes that she also wanted her book to "bring a sense of the music and the colors and the textures and the smells of the place." She is not as successful as she hoped, at least not for those of us who know the city. The city itself does not dominate the novel. The majority of scenes take place within the dusty yard of enclosed compounds, and not on the city streets.

I only visited Harar a half dozen times but Gibb's re-creation does not return me to the place. I am more familiar with Dire Dawa, but again when Gibb describes Lilly's trips down the mountain to that

city, she is unable to bring back memories to me. But Gibb does have her moments as when she first describes arriving in the lowland city.

We turned into a beautiful street lined with acacia trees bursting red and purple, speckling the street with color and shade. The buildings, modern and spacious, were cheerful pinks and yellows and crisp, clean whites. Vines spilled suggestively over their compound walls, saying: There is life here and life is good. It was so much cleaner and brighter than Harar. And so much hotter. The air was unwhispering, utterly still, and the sun blazed white even though it was already late afternoon.

Gibb, however, shines as a novelist in her development of the Lilly character and her intense, passionate, but not physical, relationship with the Ethiopian doctor, Aziz. Dr. Aziz is central to her story, even though he is a minor character in the novel. In Aziz, Gibb creates a real, sophisticated Ethiopian who deals with Islam, the Empire, and a white woman. No easy task for the good doctor.

Nor is Gibb successful in establishing the atmosphere of tenement life in London, though she does a wonderful job with the characters who fill those pages of her novel. Particularly rich are the portrayals of an Indian who is in love with Lilly, and Yusuf, an Oromo, who escapes to a refugee camp outside of Nairobi after spending seven years in prison in Addis Ababa during the years of the Dergue.

So, you ask, what's it all about, Camilla?

For those seeking an understanding of life in Ethiopia at the end of the Empire and the creation of Mengistu's reign I suggest they go elsewhere. The silent revolution is simply a backdrop in this novel, the cause of the hardships that touched and changed the lives of these characters who are all linked together by the horrors of the Dergue and the demands of Islam. What really interests the writer — and therefore the reader — is the intense relationship between this *farenji* Lilly and Dr. Aziz. Here Camilla Gibb has struck a creative vein. This is

a compelling novel and I found myself drawn back to its pages again and again, wanting to know the fate of our orphan Lilly. This is not small accomplishment for any novelist. The woman can write.

Coyne is the editor of www.peacecorpswriters.org. His next novel, The Caddie Who Knew Ben Hogan will be published by St. Martins Press in May, 2006.

Operation Solomon

The Daring Rescue of the Ethiopian Jews

by Stephen Spector

Oxford University Press, 2005

204 pages

\$28.00

Reviewed by Dane Smith (Asmara 63–65)

IN A CYNICAL AGE, it is inspiring to read of a humanitarian and diplomatic triumph. Such was the dramatic transfer of over 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel in May 1991. This unlikely enterprise involved unrelenting assertiveness by several American Jewish organizations and astute and timely diplomacy on the part of the United States and Israel. The occasion was the fall of the Stalinist regime of Mengistu Haile-Mariam at the hands of the Tigrean rebels led by Meles Zenawi, now prime minister of Ethiopia, and of the Eritrean rebels, led by current Eritrean president Esaias Afewerki. Allies in the early 1990s, they are now bitter enemies.

Stephen Spector, Professor of English at SUNY-Stony Brook and a specialist in Jewish-Christian relations, invested 14 years in the research and writing of this highly complicated story. Operation Solomon — the name brilliantly evoking the foundational narrative of the Ethiopian empire — is a tale full of improbabilities.

- How is it that Israel decided that this obscure group — known to themselves as Beta Israel (house of Israel) but to PCVs in the sixties and seventies as *falasha*, a derogatory term meaning “landless”— should be welcomed to the Jewish homeland?



- How is it that virtually the entire community of Ethiopian Jews was moved to Addis Ababa from the Gondar region during a few months in 1990, when neither Jewish nor American diplomats in Addis were convinced they faced any special danger?
- How could 15,000 impoverished rural villagers be sustained for a year in Addis Ababa during a period of chaotic regime change?
- How did Ethiopian permission for the departure of Beta Israel become linked with an aggressive American role in securing the flight of Mengistu?
- And how was it that the bulk of the emigration of Beta Israel took place in 36 hours, rather than the months and years favored by Israeli diplomats?

The outcome was in doubt even when the initial flights began to reach Ben Gurion Airport, where Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Israeli leaders greeted the first arrivals. The ingathering of the Ethiopian Jews represents one of the great historic achievements of Zionism.


A couple of the characters in this saga are familiar to the Ethiopia II group. The first is our own LaDena Robichaud Schnapper. LaDena, a health worker in Dessie and a community developer in Awasa 1963–66, became fluent in Amharic and immersed herself in Ethiopian culture. After Peace Corps she converted to Judaism, which became the center of her spiritual life. In the early 1990s she combined both passions as an activist in the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ), the organization which almost single-handedly secured the movement of the Beta Israel to Addis Ababa from Gondar. When the airlift finally got underway, she was senior AAEJ representative in Addis Ababa and played a key role in keeping families together in the initially disorderly movement to the airport.

Ethi IIs will also remember Bob Houdek, who in 1995, as U.S. Ambassador to Eritrea, hosted the visiting RPCV group at a joyous reception bringing us together with former Eritrean associates. In 1991, Bob was permanent Chargé d’Affaires at the U.S.

Embassy in Addis Ababa, the senior American official accredited to an Ethiopian regime with which the United States had severely strained relations. It was Houdek who pushed through the original plan to involve the U.S. in a diplomatic conference in London to secure a formal transfer of power from the Derg to the Tigrean rebels — thereby avoiding a bloodbath in Addis — and to link that transfer to Ethiopian permission for the departure of the Ethiopian Jews. It was also Houdek who at the last minute unearthed the number of the proper bank account to which the Israeli government and NGOs transferred a \$35 million payment to the Ethiopian government to “cover the revenue foregone by Ethiopian Airlines” so that the Israeli aircraft could complete the airlift.

The book is well-written, but some awkwardness occasionally impairs the flow of the story. To personalize the plight of the Beta Israel, Spector devotes two chapters to the experience of Chomanesh, a young woman. The chapters are not well integrated with the narrative and add little to the total picture. There is also an occasional error of fact. Commenting on the airlifts of Ethiopian Jews in the 1980s to Israel via Sudan, a secret project of the CIA facilitated by the Colonel Jaafar an Nimeiri regime, Spector states that the Sudanese who overthrew Nimeiri executed several Sudanese associated with the airlifts. These airlifts were certainly unpopular with the Sudanese masses, but the successor regime, which arranged a rigorously fair transition to democratic elections in Sudan in 1986, eschewed political executions during their year in power.

But these are quibbles. The story is so “miraculous” — an adjective frequently pronounced by participants — and Spector’s research is so scrupulous that *Operation Solomon* is a terrific read for those interested in the Beta Israel and in the transition from the Derg to the Meles regime.

Dane Smith was a U.S. Foreign Service Officer from 1967 to 1999. He served as American Ambassador to Senegal and Guinea. He was president of the National Peace Corps Association from 1999 to 2003. He now lives in Washington DC. 

E&E RPCVs — news of the group

Visit

<http://EthiopiaEritreaRPCVs.org/pages/rpcvlegacyprogram.html>

for more details about the

projects, and lists of donors for each.

RPCV Legacy Program projects

We urge you to support the on-going efforts of ETHIOPIA & ERITREA RPCVs in promoting projects that foster sustainable economic development, relieve poverty and improve the quality of life in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Donations to one of our RPCV Legacy Program projects will do just that.

Since 2003 E&E RPCVs has been a non-profit organization and all donations to our projects are tax deductible.

Here is updated information about some of our current projects:

HIV BOOKS FOR 200 COMMUNITIES

— championed by **Marian Haley Beil** (Debre Berhan 62-64) with **Charles Wood Jewett** (Aggaro, Addis Ababa 66-69), **Lois Shoemaker** (Asmara 62-64), and an anonymous donor.

E&E RPCVs continues to partner with the Hesperian Foundation that publishes health-care manuals for medical workers in remote communities. Our project is to provide funds to enable Hesperian to fulfill requests for their books that they receive from Ethiopian and Eritrean health-care workers. Donations to this project also enable Hesperian to include a copy of their book *HIV Health and Your Community* with each request they receive.

Lee Gallery (Dire Dawa 64-66) is a volunteer at the Hesperian Foundation and handles our project donations. In December Lee reported that Hesperian sent more than 200 HIV books and 300 other health-care books to Ethiopia. Only two went to Eritrea. To encourage requests from Eritrea, Dr. **Eugene Mitchell** (Asmara 64-66), who travels regularly to Eritrea, took a set of the Hesperian books with him on a recent trip and urged health-care workers there to request the free books.

Lee wrote in her December letter: "I can't begin to tell you the difference the Legacy Project has made to our ability to fulfill the requests we receive from Ethiopia. We would not have been able to send

even half the books requested if not for the generosity of our fellow E&E RPCVs. Please let everyone who had donated to this project know that they have truly made a difference."

Following our recent holiday email solicitation, E&E RPCVs sent a donation of \$1859.50 to Hesperian. Lee then wrote: "Your recent check couldn't have come at a better time. Yesterday, the day I opened it, the entire staff was meeting to hear the grim news of budget cuts across the board, including the Gratis Book Fund. When your donation was announced in the middle of the meeting, everyone stood up and cheered, as it freed up what little Gratis money has left for other countries. Please pass along our great appreciation to those who donated to the Legacy fund."

Since January of 2004 we have received \$9524.68 in donations for this project. Our original goal of raising \$6000 has been met, but because of the great value of the project the board of E&E RPCVs has voted to extend it indefinitely.

Your contributions will be greatly appreciated:

- \$30 will pay for one set of two health-care books including *HIV Health and Your Community* and the shipping cost.
- \$120 will pay for four sets.
- \$600 designate you a "champion" of the project.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR CHILDREN AT RISK

— championed by **John Kulczycki** (Debre Zeit 63-65), and **Scott Morgan** (Debre Zeit 64-66), with **Virginia McArthur** (Addis Ababa 64-66), **Charles Wood Jewett** (Aggaro, Addis Ababa 66-69), and an anonymous donor.

This E&E RPCV Legacy Program project supporting vocational training for children at risk began in 2004 with a goal of providing 30 poverty-stricken children in Addis Ababa with the means to achieve economic independence in legitimate professions. The project's partner is an Ethiopian NGO, Children Aid — Ethiopia (CHAD-ET), which was established in 1995 to protect the rights and welfare of children and to deliver services for children in dif-

Donate

All donations go directly to the recipient organizations. EEE RPCVs does not withhold any monies for operating costs.

To donate to any of these projects use the form on page 31.

If you would like to make a donation in honor of someone, please just let us know. They will be notified directly, and noted at our website.

Donate online

... through the secure e-philanthropy site "Network for Good" which deducts 3% of your donation to cover costs.

Go to

<http://EthiopiaEritreaRPCVs.org/>

and click on the blue and white button labeled "Donate Now through Network for Good."

difficult circumstances. CHAD-ET's program includes vocational training for sexually exploited children, mostly girls 15- to 18-years old. Vocational training is based on the child's interests and job prospects in areas such as tailoring, catering, and teaching. CHAD-ET assists in placement once the vocational training is complete.

Our RPCV Legacy project began with ten adolescent girls who trained in cosmetology or food preparation. Of the seven who started in cosmetology, five completed the eight-month program. The story of Sara Kassahun, one of those who completed the course, is typical. Her parents died shortly after she was born in Addis. Initially, relatives in Gondar took her in, but later a relative of her father brought her back to Addis and put her to work as his domestic servant. She ran away hoping to find domestic work, but become a commercial sex worker to survive. Now CHAD-ET is assisting her in achieving economic independence as a cosmetologist. She writes of her experience, "I see a bright future through this training, and I am sure I will manage to change my life in the time to come."

CHAD-ET has chosen a second group of ten children to participate in the project. Three girls have already begun training in food preparation; the five girls who chose cosmetology will begin their training shortly as will a boy who will his training in auto mechanics. Another boy has not yet chosen his vocational training area.

We are very fortunate to be dealing with an Ethiopian NGO which is sensitive to the needs and aspirations of these highly vulnerable and destitute children.

Our project continues to need support to achieve its goals. Please consider joining the project. In general a donation of \$36 will cover the tuition for one month of vocational training for one child, \$108 will cover three months, and \$288 will cover the tuition for a typical complete course. \$864 will cover 10% of the original budget of this project and designate you a "champion" of the project.

BORANA REGION STUDENT ACCELERATION


— championed by **E. Fuller Torrey** (Ethiopia staff: physician 1964-66) with **Kathleen Moore** (Emdeber 64-66)

Started in 2004 by the Ethiopian registered NGO Mega Vision Developmental Association (MVDA), the Borana Region Student Acceleration project provides summer classes for selected students from the Borana region in far southern Ethiopia. The classes are taught in the local Borana towns of Mega and Hidilola by university students who come from that region. In 2005, the second year of the program, 208 students (119 males, 89 females) from grades 5 to 10 were taught by 20 university students.

Students in the Borana region are disadvantaged in a number of ways. Many of their families are semi-nomads. Initial schooling is done in Oromiffa, the local language, and so their skills in Amharic and English are behind those of students in many other regions. They thus find it difficult to compete in national exams for university entrance. This program attempts to level the playing field by providing students with additional teaching in Amharic, English, mathematics, and the sciences. It also provides badly needed summer jobs for university students from this region.

MVDA plans to initiate a program to provide educational material support for girls who, as we all know, face serious obstacles in getting an education in Ethiopia. This year the program will support 40-50 girls chosen on the basis of performance. They will receive support for school uniforms, books, school supplies and residential house rental cost for those who do not live with their parents.

The project is managed by Teshome Shibre Kelkile, M.D., Ph.D., of the Mega Vision Developmental Association.

The goal for this project is \$10,000. Your contribution of any amount is welcome. 

Friends

Updating a Face Book

Editor's note: Last summer members of the Ethiopia II group received emails with byte-rich attachments. The downloads, when successful opened, contained an update of the famed face book which Ethi IIs were given when they entered training at UCLA in the summer of 1963. **Judith Nordblom Alger** (Asmara 63-65) tells the tale of assembling this bit of history and nostalgia:

About a year before our group's 2004 reunion in Chicago, **Gloria Curtis** (Asmara 63-65) sent out a request for someone to pull together the names, address and updated biographies. In one of my bursts of enthusiasm, I volunteered. Only later did I realize that my computer skills, like those of many of our age, were grossly inadequate. So, if nothing else, this job taught me about attachments, jpeg formats, and that "esl" does not mean English as a second language.

The most frustrating part of a job was discovering that all those documents and photos I attached so readily on my machine could not be detached so readily by other machines. The serious computer folk in our group offered well-intentioned suggestions on downloading. Some worked; some did not. A computer, I now truly believe, is a whimsical organism.

I received 51 updated biographies out the 127 of us who moved into Myra Hershey Hall in that summer of 1963. It would have been good to have received more. Maybe some in the group do not realize how much the others want to hear from them. The bonus for me was I got to read all those funny notes rich with memories of the past: "Where is Horace Grant now?" **Dick Crepeau**, do you know?

Unsurprisingly, most of the 51 who replied remained in fields like teaching, medicine or social work-related occupations. The others do work that involves interviewing people or work with non-profit organizations. As retirees, many of us are involved with our communities. I get the feeling from all of the positive remarks about life (although not necessarily about politics) that most of those who replied have remained social liberals, children

of the sixties. Isn't that great? Shouldn't Sarge have become president?

The saddest part for me was finding out that two of my best friends are no longer here. **Katie Schultze**, **Jim Solomon** and I still remember the remarkable trip we took all over Ethiopia with **Ivan Myers** and **Preston Perlman** in a Peace Corps Jeep. We had at least a dozen flat tires plus a fuel leak. We slept in schoolyards. We won't forget Ivan and Preston.

Gloria Curtis did all of the preliminary work. Don Curtis was her backup, constantly trying to answer my stupid computer questions. They are the backbone of our great group and deserve a chorus of ululations.

If non-communicants in the group want copies of the bios and photos, contact me at vbede673@aol.com.

Reunions

Ethiopia/Eritrea II

Ethiopia II will hold a reunion in Seattle from August 11 to August 13. The group will stay at The University Inn (Tel 206 632-5055 www.universityinnseattle.com), or, if that is full, an affiliated property, The Watertown Inn (206 826-4242 www.wtaretownseattle.com.) Christina Wissink at hotel.sales@universityinnseattle.com knows about the group and will provide a good rate (including AAA and AARP discounts), but rooms may go fast because it's the summer tourist season and the hotel can not hold a block of rooms for the group. These two hotels are in the University of Washington area. Other hotels, most likely more expensive but perhaps more commodious, are nearby if people in the group wish to explore on their own.

On Friday night, Aug. 11th the group will have dinner at the Assimba Ethiopian Restaurant, 2722 East Cherry Street, Seattle. Tel: 206 826.4242. The manager, Messeret, who was taught by Peace Corps Volunteers in Addis, is eager to host the RPCV party and promises to secure a lively Ethiopian band to provide an opportunity to test the group's residual dancing skills. Performance will not count toward

WE ARE STILL in need of a couple of volunteers who live in the D.C. area to help organize our reunion that will take place as part of the NPCA celebration of the 45th anniversary of the Peace Corps on Sept. 15-16, 2006.

Please contact Marian Beil at mhbeil@rochester.rr.com if you'd like to help.

de-selection. Saturday will feature a possible presentation by an African studies professor from the University of Washington. This will be followed by a picnic and cookout in local park or nearby island. Saturday evening is free for those wanting to sample Seattle's attractions. For those still capable of staying up past 9 p.m. think Wagner at the Seattle Opera or the clubs along "The Ave," a nearby street studded with local college hangouts. On Sunday the group will assemble for a farewell breakfast at the University Inn. Featured topic: plans for the next reunion.

This is a work in progress, says **Ed Lynch** (Nazareth 63-65), who has become chairperson of the planning group. All suggestions are welcome. He can be reached at EDMUNDELYNCH@cs.com

Ethiopia/Eritrea XIII

A reunion of Ethiopia XIII will be held on the weekend of March 24, 2006 in Washington, DC. It will start with a reception Friday evening. A group of rooms are being held at the Channel Inn on Water St., SW. Participants should make their own reservations by calling 800-368-5668. Dr. Tsehaye Teferra, who was a language instructor during our in-country training, and who is now the director of the Ethiopian Community Development Council, in Arlington, VA., will be hosting an Ethiopian dinner at his center on Saturday night. Plans for Saturday are still be formulated and there will be a group breakfast at the hotel on Sunday. For further information contact **Bob Gausman** (Dorze, Boditi 70-72) at rjgausman@yahoo.com or at 703-866-1968.

Reports

Neal Sobania (Addis Ababa 68-72) . . . has been named executive director of The Wang Center of International Programs at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma. He writes: "I am also a member of the history department here, but main role as executive director, a deans' level position, is to lead the college's strategic goal of having 50% of our students studying overseas by the year 2010, and assist in more fully developing the university's five gateway centers in Mexico, China, Namibia,

Norway and Trinidad and Tobago. Lots more, but suffice it to say I am finding it all reinvigorating."

George Parish and Patricia Summers Parish (both Dessie 62-64) . . .

were accepted by the Peace Corps/Crisis Corps and served for two months in the New Orleans/Katrina Area working with FEMA doing personal needs assessments.

Looking for . . .

Chris Carlsen (Addis Ababa 65-66) would like to reconnect with **Tom Walker** (Addis Ababa 65-67). **Marilyn Snyder Halper** (Asbe Tefari, Ambo 66-68) would like to contact **John Timmins** (Asbe Tefari 64-67). **Susan Flyr Royston** (Malele 66-68) would like to get in touch with **Judy Froemsdorf** (66-68)

If you can help, write mhbeil@rochester.rr.com.

Judy Hodges Coryell (Debre Zeit 65-67), who lives in Paris, would love to hear from RPCV friends. Her address is 35 Blvd. Ornano, 75018, Paris France.

Deaths

> **Larry Demarest** (Dessie, Addis Ababa 66-68), who was a training and organizational development consultant in St. Paul, passed away this past November.

> **Herm Nibbelink** (Adi Quala 62-64) died December 21, 2005 in Lee's Summit, Missouri. He retired in 1992 after teaching English at the college level. During his time as a Peace Corps Volunteer Herm recorded Tigrinyan folk tales told to him by his seventh and eighth grade students. He subsequently typed them up and produced a booklet of them. He received permission from his headmaster and the Eritrean Directorate of Education to substitute the folk tales for the reading matter that was in use, *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Herm wrote: "My students were delighted and amazed that their own stories could be told in English." The Peace Corps World Wise School program published one of the folk tales, "The Center of the Earth," found at


<http://peacecorps.gov/wws/folktales/centeroftheearth.html>

> **Mark Scott** (Agaro 64–66) passed away from cancer April 2, 2005. Several years after completing service Mark married fellow Ethiopia IV RPCV **Penelope Rude**.

> **Kay Simmons** (Nazret 62–64) died on January 23 due to complications from pancreatic cancer. Her husband, **Larry** (Nazret 62–64) wrote: "She treasured all of her associations with Ethiopia and with Ethiopia and Eritrea RPCVs."

> This past October **Willie mae Harris Webster** (Makele 62–64) succumbed to Alzheimer's disease that she'd been fighting for the previous six years.

In September Willie mae's daughter Cidney con-

tacted the NPCA trying to reach some of her old friends. That message was forward to E&E RPCVs, and we forwarded it on to those who had served with her. Upon Willie mae's death, Cidney wrote: "I want to thank you all for your e-mail notes, cards, letters and pictures. I shared them all with her and I know it gave her comfort to hear from you all and to know that she was in your thoughts and prayers. And I want to thank you for myself for your phone calls and stories about my mom and her Peace Corps days. It's been a comfort to me to know that my mom was so well loved and remembered. I can't say it enough; Peace Corps alums are amazing! Your compassion and dedication carried on well past the end of your years of service." 

THE HERALD

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Contributing editor: Shlomo Bachrach (Staff: training: PC/Eth 66–68, UCLA 64, St. Thomas 68).

We'd like to thank those who volunteered articles, ideas and effort for this issue of *THE HERALD*. We especially appreciate the work of the book reviewers who carried a particularly heavy load this issue.

The news summaries in *THE HERALD* were written from dozens of items forwarded to *THE HERALD* by Shlomo Bachrach, who culls news stories about Ethiopia and Eritrea from many sources and sends them out to a long list of interested parties, including many RPCVs. He can be contacted at: shlomo@eastafrikaforum.net

Sources for the news summaries in this issue include: Addis Ababa Tribune; Africast.com; ; Agence France-Presse; All Africa Global Media (allAfrica.com); Awate.com; Daily Monitor of Addis Ababa; Associated Press; Reuters; BBC; East African Standard; Eritrea New Agency; Ethiopian Government Information Service; The New York

Times; ONLF.org; Panafrican News Agency; Shae-bia.com; the United Nations Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia; U.N. news service: U.N. Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) www.irin-news.org; USA Today; Visafric; The Washington Post; www.reliefweb.int.

Please send articles

THE HERALD is most eager to receive submissions. Our pages are open to all. Have you recently revisited Ethiopia or Eritrea? Have you made contact with former students or friends from Peace Corps days? Have you come across interesting articles, books, exhibitions that you think the rest of us would like to know about? Have you had some new thoughts about your Peace Corps service? About Ethiopia or Eritrea? About teaching and development? All these would make wonderful articles for *THE HERALD*. We also enthusiastically welcome photo submissions.

Send ideas, submissions, suggestions, or even cranky letters-to-the-editor to:

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E&E RPCVs Library

Our library contains a wide variety of materials including books, vide os, and magazine articles of special interest to our members. All materials in the library can be borrowed at no cost by members of the group. Go to our website for a listing of the library contents — or if you are not online contact Librarian Hayward Allen, at 264 Garnsey Road, Pittsford, NY 14534, or 585/264-9162 to receive a printed list.

Does it say “Expired” above your name in the address block?

If so, it’s time to send in your \$15 fee to continue to receive *THE HERALD*, an award winning newsletter edited by retired *Time* magazine correspondent **Barry Hillenbrand** (Debre Marcos 63–65) and to continue to support other activities of Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs that include

- the RPCV Legacy Program projects —
 - “Borana Region Student Acceleration”
 - “HIV Books for Rural Communities”
 - “Vocational Training for Children at Risk”
- the great reunions we present at RPCV conferences.
- the website that has been so instrumental in helping RPCVs reconnect with friends and former students.

Below is a form to renew your affiliation with E&E RPCVs. Please continue your support of our efforts.

From the National Peace Corps Association

The NPCA seeks librarians and individuals with strong connections to libraries for a pilot global education program in U.S. public libraries in 2006. Please contact NPCA Program Associate, Ellen Frierson, at teachnet@rpcv.org with a brief description of your position or connection along with your contact information.

Thank you!

Anne Baker, Vice President
National Peace Corps Association

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