

Remembering unique Eritreans in contemporary history

*A short biographical sketch
Of
Blatta Mohammed Omer Qadi*



Compiled & edited from electronic sources

*By
Emnetu Tesfay*

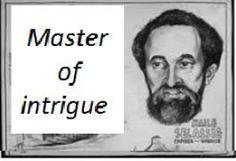
Main source: The fertile womb: Giants from the recent past

*By
Saleh Gadi*

Stavanger, Norway

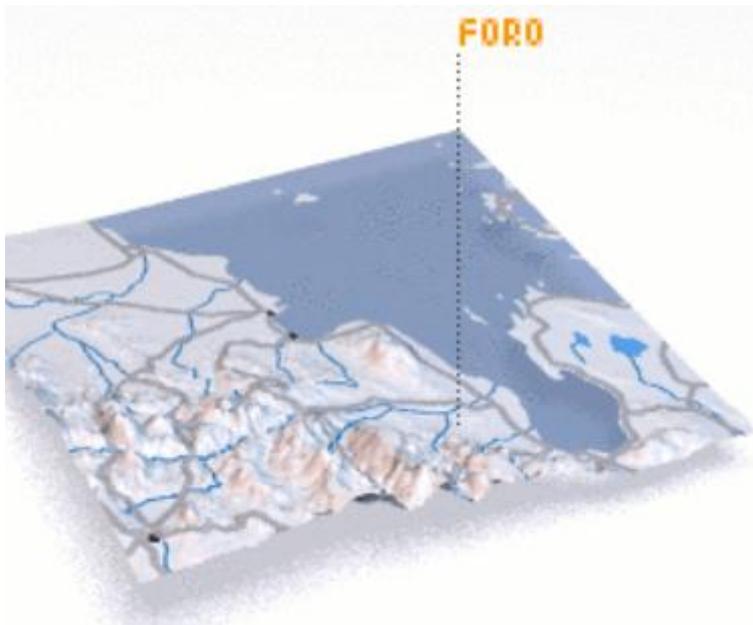
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Early life and personal data

Blata Mohammed was born in 1909 in Foro, to an enlightened religious family. He lived most of his adult life in Massawa where from an early age; he gained prominence and respect for his soft spoken and reconciling attitude. Most people remember him as a man who was born with diplomatic and political gifts. His honesty and farsightedness earned him close friendships with the nationalist politicians of the time. He developed close ties with personalities like Abdulkadir Kebire and Weldaab Weldemariam to name a few. Together with his nationalist friends, he was the founding member of the Mahber Fiqri Hager Party.



Foro (21.8km from Massaua)

A shrewd politician and a lawyer by training, Mohammed Omer Qadi farsightedness was the cause for politicians of the time to flock to his house in Massawa to seek advice on how to tackle political impasses. His house in Massawa was frequented by educated elite of the period. His Mejlis, a social and political meeting place, was always busy and the scene of many political decisions.

Important and strong media man of the 40's and 50'
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Blatta Mohammed was one of the earliest Eritrean intellectuals who left his mark in Eritrean political history. Fluent in both Italian and Arabic, on top of Tigrigna, Tigre and Saho, Blatta Mohammed was a widely read prolific writer. He was the publisher of the weekly Arabic Newspaper, Sawt Eritrea, the mouthpiece of the Moslem League from 1943 until its closure by executive orders in 1954. Later, in 1952, the beginning of the federation period, he became the director of the Italian Newspaper, Union e Progresso. Blatta Mohammed was one of the important and hard working nationalist politicians of his time.

Obsessed with the unity of Eritreans, he worked hard before and during the Bet-Giorghis conference of 1946 to bring about a solid unity of the nationalist movements. To this end, he joined hands with the all the nationalists of the time while at the same time trying to bring the other side, the Unionists, closer to the nationalist movement. He was mindful that the divide among Eritreans would come to the advantage of Haile Sellasie who would find it easy to annex

Eritrea. For this reason, he was much preoccupied with finding a solution to the problem. Though Blatta Mohammed hinted of a compromise deal to the Unionists in the Bet-Ghiorgis conference, the Andnet Party had vowed not to accept anything less than unconditional and total unity with “Mother” Ethiopia.

Giants from the recent past

By Saleh Gadi, Oct. 14, 2000

Talk about Eritrean History and names of the two Giants, **Ibrahim Sultan and Welda’ab**, are certainly to be mentioned. The two men have left their clear marks in the formation of Eritrea.

In the beginning, both had different visions for the future of Eritrea but dawn the road of the arduous struggle of the forties, they met and debated thus harmonized their views. Thereafter, they became the most famous political twins in the history of Eritrea.



Weldeab Weldemariam and Ibrahim Sultan

Welda'ab, who signed his name as **Welwel**, started as a staunch defender of the Tigrai-Tigrigna cause and to that end, he fiercely rejected and struggled against any "Amhara" hegemony in the region. He was suspicious of Haile-Sellasié's designs and foresaw what awaited Eritrea if those designs ever materialized. As one of the leading and highly respected intellectual of the era, he used his writing ability to educate his readers through the pages of '**Haddas Eritrea**', a Tigrigna Newspaper that was published in the forties. To Date, Welwel is considered an important reference in regards to the Tigrigna language.

Many remember Ibrahim Sultan a true patriot who struggled for the independence of Eritrea. However, very few remember the social revolution that Ibrahim Sultan carried for many years. The extremely brave and piercingly blunt Ibrahim Sultan was a born-revolutionary who was bound to make great change in his society. Before the revolution of Ibrahim Sultan, the societies of the Eritrean lowlands were divided into two classes: the **Shmagele** and the **Tigre**. The former were the few privileged nobles while the latter were helpless serfs who owned no land and who did all the menial jobs for the nobles. Not more than 2% of the population, the noble Shumagles, controlled the Tigre under a strictly regimental system of existence which was considered a slavery of some sort. Ibrahim Sultan, a Tigre himself, struggled to emancipate the subjugated Tigre. To achieve his goal, he mobilized the whole Tigre population under the banner of Islam. Ibrahim Sultan's class revolution was the first of its kind in the region. Today, thanks to Ibrahim's revolution, no traces of such divisions can be traced in the societies of the Eritrean lowlands.

Ibrahim Sultan founded the formidable party Al Rabita Al Islamiya, which he used for dual purposes. His first goal was to unite the dawn-trodden serfs and empower them to free themselves from any kind of injustice. His second goal was to mobilize Eritreans to foil the annexation plan to unite Eritrea with Ethiopia, which he definitely saw as risk to his people. In no time, the Rabita party expanded to the Highland where charismatic intellectual Abdelkadir Kebire (the next edition of "The Fertile Womb" will be his brief history) become a major player in the struggle to assert Eritrea's self-determination. Also, the party expanded to Massawa where another prominent figure from the Qadi family played an important role in consolidating its power base.

Welwel is probably among the most notable of the handful of Eritrean intellectual in the forties. He started as clerk under the Italian administration and became a popular writer, Tigrinalogist and a political visionary. He championed the Tigrai-Tigrini plan for a while until he abandoned that idea for the total independence of Eritrea. He became a close friend and a “brother” of Ibrahim Sultan.

A class struggle champion and an Ethnic interest protector met. One can only imagine the consciousness and dedication they had in order to be able to harmonize their struggle and lead the society in the difficult times. They emphasized on the need for a united people to foil any attempt that Eritrea would face. Both men were instrumental in the convening of the biggest Eritrean conference, ‘**Wala Bet Giorghis**’ and later they became very influential in the Independence Bloc that was formed in the forties. It is to be noted that the Independence Bloc was headed by Ras Tessema Asberom (awate.com is compiling his brief history) while Ibrahim Sultan was its Secretary General.

Given the local and international situation that prevailed when the UN was debating the fate of Eritrea, both Ibrahim Sultan and Welwel were forced to accept **UN Resolution 390 A (v)** regarding the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. They believed the federation to be the lesser evil than unconditional unity with Janhoi’s Ethiopia. Later, the unionist thugs of the Mahber Andnet become very violent. Assassinations become the main tool of the unionist. The Emperor was openly financing the Andenet Party to weaken the Pro-Independence parties. To make things worse, in 1948, a known thug assassinated Abdelkadir Kebire, the leader of the Rabita Party in Asmara, on the eve of his travel to New York to present the Eritrean case to the UN.

From 1947 to 1953, Welwel escaped seven attempts on his life. One such attempt was to kill him by poisoned food. In 1953, Welwel left for Egypt via Sudan after refusing asylum offers from the US, Britain and other European countries. From Cairo, he started to broadcast his messages to Eritrea; something, which was considered the most effective means of resistance of the time to the Ethiopian occupation. A fine writer, and a journalist, Welwel

struggled to educate Eritreans and he pressured to have Eritreans to be educated since the days of the Italian colonization. He was a loved 'rebel' and extremely influenced the public opinion. Thus, he was considered the main danger to the Janhoy's regime.

From the beginning of the federation era, the Emperor's agents were openly sabotaging the federal arrangement. Endalkachew Messai, the Emperor's representative and son-in-law, was clearly killing the spirit of the federation. He imposed the Amharic language in the National assembly in violation of the constitution that stipulated Arabic and Tigrigna were the official languages. The Railway system of Eritrea was federalized when it was clearly stated that it would remain under the local Eritrean Government. Railroad workers began to strike. For Ibrahim Sultan and others, that was a clearly the beginning of executing the plans to annex Eritrea with Ethiopia. The general mood in Eritrea was leading towards armed struggle to protect Eritrean interests. Ras Tessema Asberom pulled himself out of the parliament when he was convinced that the federal arrangement was being destroyed by the Ethiopian government --article by article. In 1959, Idris Mohammed Adem and Ibrahim Sultan gave up and joined Welwel in his exile in Cairo. Together, the three men issued several petitions to the US and to the Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjold, to intervene in defense of the Federal arrangement that Emperor Haile Selassie was violating.

The friendship of these two great men, Ibrahim Sultan and Welwel, continued for over forty years until Shiekh Ibrahim Sultan passed away in Cairo in 1988. Welwel lived to see the independence of Eritrean and he passed away in 1995. Upon the passing away of Ibrahim Sultan, the eulogy that Welwel wrote for his life-long friend is undisputedly the most moving piece ever written in the Eritrean literature. The piece known as 'Yezekerekado?' is simply document that must be treated as a valuable treasure.

Though there are tiny difference of views among Eritrean in regards to the role the two great men, played, it is clear that both men earned the respect of all Eritreans. They clearly left their spirit on Eritrean politics forever.

Blatta Mohammed Omer Qadi: The reconciling nationalist

By Saleh Gadi, January 23, 2001

In the absence of a working democracy, competition among political parties leads to bloody confrontations where, very often, one side is vanquished and the other comes out victorious. Regardless of the outcome of the competition, most societies bear the heavy cost of such political confrontations. In the absence of democratic institutions and a democratic process, the only way to avoid such disastrous confrontations is to find a compromise formula that would serve as a middle ground for the antagonists. Such was the situation in the forties that finally led to the unjust and forced federation of Eritrea and Ethiopia.



Blatta Mohammed Omer Qadi

Today when we talk about the Federation with Ethiopia, we portray it as a criminal act that paved the way to the full annexation by Ethiopia. The federation arrangement, that was supposed to be guaranteed by the world community, was violated because the UN and major international countries abandoned Eritrea, which was so weak to protect itself. Needless to say, the Unionist Party and Haile Sellasie, encouraged by the prevailing politics

of the cold war, were the main cause that led to the creation of the federation in the first place and its violation once it was implemented. The federation was a compromise stand bitterly accepted by the Independentists. However, as weak as it was due to the prevailing internal and external politics of the time, the federation gave Eritreans their first ever Constitution, Flag, Court and police system and House of representatives.

Throughout history, compromise formulas have saved nations from many disasters. In the forties, Eritreans were divided into two major political camps. The prominent parties representing the two major divides among the people were far apart. It seemed that nothing less than a total victory of one side over the other could bring about a conclusion to the then prevailing crisis. The Unionists, represented by Mahber Andnet, were calling for an unconditional union with Ethiopia while the Independentists, represented by Al-Rabita Al-Islamiya, in the Independence Bloc, were struggling for the unconditional independence of Eritrea. In between the two major views, several other options were floated, for example, partitioning of Eritrea where one part, the Western Region of Eritrea, would be incorporated to the Sudan and the other part, The Eritrean Highlands, would be annexed with Ethiopia. There were also another parties with less relevant views, for example those that espoused the idea of British trusteeship, etc. The man who was most influential in promoting the compromise formula that finally brought about the federation act was probably non other than Blata Mohammed omer Qadi.

Waala Biet Giorghis by Sami Mehari, November 2002

In the forties, the Eritrean arena was full of political parties because the big powers had a design for the future of Eritrea. Ethiopia intensified its bid and started to finance the Andnet party. Patriotic Eritreans also intensified their struggle to confront any decision that might endanger the welfare of their people and put the future of Eritrea at risk. In this atmosphere, the famous convention known as 'Wa'ela Bet Ghiorgis', where all religious leaders, social notables and politicians of the time attended was convened. Political parties left the convention divided on the major issue of the type of relation they should have with Ethiopia.

As a consequence of the outcome of the Bet Ghiorgis Convention and other concerns that Ibrahim Sultan espoused, the Islamic League (Rabita Al Islamiya) was formed in 1946. The president of the party was Al Said Bekri Al Murghani while Ibrahim Sultan was the Secretary General of the party. Kebire was elected as the Party's leader in Asmara and its surroundings. In reality, Ibrahim was the strategist and visionary of the party while Kebire was the political dynamo behind the formidable force of the Islamic League.

The Andnet party considered him one of the most dangerous men who could undermine their struggle for the unconditional union of Eritrea with Ethiopia. He was perceived as the thorn that stood on their way. He received many threats on his life and many tried to intimidate him. The Andnet thugs burned his farm in Ailet. His Dairy farm in Merara was destroyed and armed men of the Andnet 'shiftas' forcefully took all the cows in the farm. Nothing stopped him from struggling for the self-determination of Eritrea. He loudly said that he was only afraid of the Almighty and no one else. "Cowards can take my life but they can never own my conviction and views", is the belief that Kebire so much practiced.

This week marks the 56th anniversary of an important conference that was convened in the outskirts of Asmara on Sunday 24 November 1946 on Eritrea's emerging political trends of that period. The conference, better known as *Waalā Biet Giorgis*, was the brainchild of the independence-minded patriots like Woldeab Woldemariam who wanted to reconcile

differences among the various trends by agreeing on middle ground. The elite of the time expected much from that early Eritrean political gathering. Unfortunately, Ethiopia, working through Eritrean collaborators, sabotaged it. In short, the *Waalā* forgot its main agenda on the future of the country and, instead, was diverted to a non-issue when Tedla Bairu,

totally a newcomer to the group, provoked discussion on the 'origin' of Woldeab Woldemariam and questioned Woldeab's right to talk for Eritrea. Believe it or not, that was all what the *Waal* discussed before it was disrupted by unionist hooligans armed with knives and pistols.

Thanks to two valuable sources - Alemseged Tesfai's *Aynfelale* and Jordan Ghebremdhin's *Peasants and Nationalism in Eritrea* - we have some historical record on that sad, yet important, event in modern Eritrean history. Based on those sources, I will try to give readers a summary of *Waal Biet Giorgis*, which acquires added significance today as we read about the recent meeting of the Alliance in Addis Ababa and also as we think of the proposed National Conference for the Eritrean opposition.

In 1941, i.e. soon after the defeat of Italy and the establishment of the British in the territory, Eritrean elite of the day formed the [Eritrean] Patriotic Association (some writers prefer to call it 'Party of Love of Country'). At the start, people were in genuine search for their destiny. The question: 'what should the future of Eritrea be?' was in the minds of all politically conscious Eritreans. A moderate intellectual called Gebre-Meskel Woldu chaired the [Eritrean] Patriotic Association. Abdulkadir Kebire was his deputy.

By 1946, the group consisted of two major contending political trends that needed reconciliation. One was a faction calling for Eritrea's association with Ethiopia and another faction advocating a separate status. Those who wanted 'association' with Ethiopia were led by Gebre-Meskel Woldu and the 'separatists' by Abdulkadir Kebire.

The differences between the two factions were sharpened following a number of domestic and international events and incidents that can be summed as follows:

1. **Ethiopian Liaison Office in Eritrea:** In March 1946, Ethiopia appointed a Liaison Officer in Eritrea by the name of Col. Nega Haile Selassie. His duty was to instigate differences among Eritreans, mainly on religious lines, and create a unionist movement like the 'Society for the Unification of Eritrea with Ethiopia' that the Emperor's government created in Addis Ababa a year earlier. During May-July 1946, anti-Arab, anti-Islam and anti-Italy demonstrations were staged in Eritrea. Lives of individuals became under big threat by Ethiopian agents. The British tried to maintain public security in Eritrea through what was called Sudanese Defense Force (SDF). While doing its job, the force was projected by Col. Nega and his team as "enemy of Christian Eritreans".
2. **Tor'a-Tsenadegle Conflict:** On 15 August 1946, the Tor'a and Tsenadegle conflict erupted in Akele-Guzai; 11 Tor'as were killed and 40 wounded. Another three were killed from the side of Tsenadegle. Land dispute was the cause of the conflict although people did not stop associating it with religion.
3. **The 28 August 1946 massacre in Asmara:** It was Eid day, and members of the SDF were playing cards near Aba Shawl. A simple scuffle with a young Eritrean "Christian" resulted in the death of one Sudanese soldier. The SDF interpreted it as an open attack on the SDF by the unionists. A few hours later, 70-armed Sudanese soldiers went down town Asmara and massacred people in "Christian" quarters of the city; 46 persons were killed and 70 wounded. Col. Nega capitalized on the incident. The Coptic Church found a rallying cry for immediate union with Ethiopia, then claiming to be "protector of Christian Eritreans". Eritrean Moslems had nothing to do with the SDF and that incident but the massacre was taken as a "Moslem-Christian" conflict.

4. **Paris Peace Treaty:** On 25 September 1946, the Paris Peace Treaty of the major powers agreed to dispossess Italy of its former colonies. The peoples in the former Italian territories would be asked their future preferences. Soon after the Paris meeting, the British authorities allowed Eritreans to form political movements and parties.

5. **Assassination Attempts:** During September 1946, bombs were lobbed at leading 'separatist' figures in Asmara. Bombs missed Degiat Hassen Ali and Haj Imam Mussa, both prominent leaders of the independentist faction.

Woldeab Woldemariam and his friends saw the looming danger. Many members of the Patriotic Association (which was still Eritrean in aim) thought that there was still time for them to iron out differences within the group by adopting a common platform that they can be reached through political compromises. The factions accepted the slogan of 'dialogue, unity and democracy'. Even Fit. Gebre-Meskel Woldu agreed with Woldeab and others on putting conditions on Ethiopia before any association was entered to. The first meeting for adopting an agenda was held on 16 November 1946. It is said that a 12-point item agenda was accepted for the *Waal* suggesting the idea of an autonomous Eritrea, which would enjoy civil liberties like freedom of press, religion, association, formation of parties and settle the issue of languages. The British authorities were advised on the matter, and granted permission for the main *Waal* to take place in Biet Giorgis as scheduled.

Ethiopia, which knew what was going on in the [Eritrean] Patriotic Association, was angered. Col. Nega, who was in Addis on reporting mission after the August massacre, hurriedly returned to Asmara together with a representative of the unionist society in Addis Ababa. It was claimed that they returned to Asmara carrying bags of "money and bombs".

Unionists Meet, Tedla Bairu Emerges

Upon his return to Asmara in the eve of the *Waalaa*, Col. Nega held an emergency meeting with supporters in which Fit. Gebre-Meskel was harangued to humiliation and suspended from leadership of the unionist faction within the [Eritrean] Patriotic Association. He was asked to renounce his agreement with the 'separatists'. The meeting with Col. Nega agreed to stop the *Waalaa* from taking place. But if convened, it was no more Gebre-Meskel Woldu but Tedla Bairu who was asked by Col. Nega to lead the team. Many observers, including Kennedy Trevaskis, recorded that even the meeting of the two factions for formulating the agenda might not have taken place if Col. Nega were in Asmara on 16 November 1946.

The Main Waala, 24 November

By 10 a.m. of the fixed date, some 30 delegates from the faction of the supporter of independence arrived at the meeting place led by Degiat Hassen Ali of Meraguz. Other key figures included Woldeab Woldemariam, Ibrahim Sultan and Berhanu Ahmedin. The bigger delegation of the unionist faction in the Patriotic Association, which included many youth, arrived late. Beside the new star, Tedla Bairu, other key figures in the delegation included Degiat Beyene Beraki, Blatta Demsas W/Michael and the humiliated Fit. Gebre-Meskel Woldu.

The atmosphere of the gathering was so tense that no one could take it for what it was originally planned: a meeting for peace, unity and reconciliation. It was far from that.

First to speak was Bl. Demsas W/Michael who said: "You callers for independence, you are mistaken. When one talks to parents, one does not pose conditions. We Eritreans cannot make conditions to be united with Ethiopia. We just unite". The subdued Fit. Gebre-Meskel

also spoke against “conditional union” and against all what he previously agreed in the 12-point agenda for the *Waala*. The independentist then knew that the whole thing has been reversed and that there was little do be done at this long-awaited *Waala*.

The other speaker was Tedla Bairu who eloquently presented the unionist version but with threats of action against those who would dare to try to stop them. He immediately diverted the attention of the meeting to the ethnic origin of Woldeab, and finger-pointing at Woldeab said: “You are from Tigrai; why do you meddle in Eritrean affairs by sometimes calling for trusteeship and at other times talking about conditional union with Ethiopia”. Woldeab retorted in the strongest terms possible. He expressed pride for his advocacy of a better solution for Eritrea to which he said he belonged through long and joint history. During those heated exchanges, the unionist hooligans started to physically harass the ‘separatists’. Woldeab was taken away in a car to Adi Nefas where he spent the whole day to avoid any head-on coalition with the thugs.

Moves for reconciliation and dialogue between the two factions were stopped. This was the end of the [Eritrean] Patriotic Association. It was replaced by the Patriotic Association for the Union of Eritrea with Ethiopia, and members of the latter name became literal agents of the state of Ethiopia. It was time for the independentists to start establishing their own political parties.

The visible humiliation reflected in the face of the once great leader Fit. Gebre-Meskel Woldu was a sad surprise at the *Waala*. The other major surprise was the sudden emergence of Tedla as a leader. He was a British civil servant until only a few weeks before the convening of the *Waala*. Woldeab himself wrote: “No one knew how and from where

this Tedla came to the unionist side". But Tedla retorted defending his past service to Ethiopia: "May the Lord reward me and my children for all what I have done for Ethiopia". Jordan Gebremedhin wrote in his 1989 book:" Tedla Bairu made his entry into unionist politics preceding *Waalā Biet Giorgis* and acquired fame in his zealous sabotage of the *Waalā's* efforts at peace and reconciliation". Col. Nega thought that Tedla was a lightweight politician in Eritrea of the day because of his lack of domestic support. 'Not a full-blooded [Habesha] neither a Copt nor a Moslem, Ato Tedla Bairu found himself in a weak and precarious position', Col. Nega thought.

Waalā Beit Giorgis was the first failed attempt by Eritreans of different viewpoints to solve political problems through dialogue. However, that first attempt was thwarted by Ethiopia's interference in Eritrean affairs. That interference would not have succeeded without the collaboration of some Eritreans, especially the intellectuals of the day.

Contact address: samimehari@hotmail.com

After the Bet-Ghiorgis conference, Blatta Mohammed joined the Moslem League that was led by Ibrahim Sultan. Blatta Mohammed's drive to find a compromise formula with the Union Party was the reason for the falling apart between him and Ibrahim Sultan who was apprehensive of Blatta Mohammed's "soft" stand. After many years of negotiations and violent confrontation between the Unionists and The Moslem League, when the Unionists always had the upper hand, the two parties could not agree on the future of Eritrea or come any closer towards each other. The stands of the two parties were drifting apart further by the day. Ibrahim Sultan was not willing to compromise with the Unionists; he advocated unconditional independence of Eritrea. On the other hand, Blatta Mohammed was aware of the hurdles against the wishes of Eritreans for independence. He was also aware of the very dangerous lines along which Eritreans were divided. He thought of a formula that would

bring the different parties together where all can, at least, claim partial victory. He was determined to find a compromise formula that would bring the Independists and the Unionists closer and save Eritrea from partitioning and disintegration. To this end, he started to explore a compromise formula that later developed to be an option of federation. His view was the cause for him and Ibrahim Sultan to fall apart. After staying with the Moslem League, under the leadership of Ibrahim Sultan until 1949, Blatta Mohammed became the leader of the Moslem League of Massawa, a splinter group that split from the Moslem League. In 1949, he traveled to New York to represent his party in the deliberations regarding the fate of Eritrea.

The federation formula, which the USA openly supported, was strengthened after the five-member fact-finding commission arrived in Eritrea to investigate the will of the Eritrean people. Though the commission didn't reach a unanimous decision, the union option was certainly defeated. Pakistan ardently supported the Independence of Eritrea and so did Guatemala a lesser degree. South Africa and Burma supported the compromise deal of federation. While Norway opposed the federation in favor of a total unity of Eritrea and Ethiopia. However, the USA was working hard for a federation deal. Finally, the USA openly pushing for a federal arrangement, the UN adapted the federal solution against the will of the majority of Eritreans.

At later stages, it would become apparent to Blata Mohammed, that the Haile Sellasie regime was not honest about the federal arrangement and that it was systematically trying hard to dismantle it and incorporate Eritrea. This become very clear to him when he observed the mechanizations of Asfeha Weldemikael, who was bent on dismantling the federal institutions and the government of Eritrea. To challenge the unionist collaborators' actions, first he pursued his opposition legally by filing a series of cases with the Eritrean Supreme courts. He also challenged the legality of the second parliamentary elections, which were held in 1956, which Asfeha Weldemicael, the Chief Executive of Eritrea had rigged. He failed to achieve anything.

By 1957, Blatta Mohammed became the target of the Unionist terrorists who considered him their main enemy after they killed Kebire and forced Weldaab, Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem to exile. There was no other choice for Blatta Mohammed but to leave Eritrea. He fled to The Sudan where Sudanese friend helped him print a booklet about the Eritrean crisis. Then he went to Cairo and started to prepare legal cases to fight against the obvious annexation plan that Ethiopia was pursuing by dismantling the federal institutions of Eritrea. He secured many signatures from Eritrean nationalist politicians and notables and prepared a petition. From Cairo, where the Egyptian government financed his trip to The United States of America, he carried a petition to the United Nations Headquarters to remind the world body of its responsibilities in safeguarding the Federal arrangement that it forced on Eritrea. He received a cold reception from the UN and nothing fruitful came out of his legal attempts. However, he registered a considerable success in the corridors of the United Nations by winning the support of many Arab and third world Diplomats in the UN. Blata Mohammed's campaign in New York and his petition, followed by similar petitions by Ibrahim Sultan in 1962, and Idris Mohammed Adam in 1963, arguably laid the groundwork for the future support of the Eritrean Struggle by the Arab countries, Cuba and China.

Haile Sellasie: master of intrigue

While Blatta Mohammed was in New York, he was contacted by the Ethiopian Delegation who handed him a message from Haile Sellasie who said that he have come to know of the grievances and promised to look into the matters personally. He was also invited to come to Addis Ababa immediately to meet Emperor Haile Sellasie who will look into his complaints. Cheated by Haile Sellasie's invitation, Blatta Mohammed traveled to Ethiopia to meet the Emperor. However, he was told that the Emperor was busy and meet with him at a later date. Until then, he was advised to go to Asmara and stay with his family while he waited for the upcoming meeting with Haile Sellasie.

He returned to Eritrea and started to openly explain his views in objection to the violations of the federal agreement by Ethiopia. This was the time when Ato Weldaab's radio transmission stopped beaming from Cairo. The silence of Ato Weldaab's voice had a negative impact on the moral of the people and coming-back of Blatta Mohammed gave Eritreans a New Hope. People started to rally behind him and the nationalist feeling started to build momentum. It was around this time also that a young man by the name Mohammed Said Naud and his friends were forming the Eritrean Liberation Movement was formed.

In January 1958, Blata Mohammed Omer Qadi was arrested. His arrest sparked a widespread revolt and widespread protests in Eritrea. In April 1958, the soft-spoken politician was accused of 'treason' and sentenced to a ten-year imprisonment. However, in the sixties, after the illegal exercise of annexing Eritrea was completed, the Ethiopian government tried to use him as a bridge to appease the people of Eritrea who were already rebelling against the illegal occupation of their country, and set him free.

In 1969, Blatta Mohammed was appointed the Mayor of Massawa. From his office in Massawa, he maintained contacts with Saleh Osman Sabbe and Idris Mohammed Adem, his friend from the fifties. In 1975, he was arrested by the Derg and suffered in jail for over two years. After his release in 1977, he left Eritrea and settled in the Sudan for sometime until he finally settled in Jeddah, Saudi-Arabia.

End of life

During his stay in Saudi-Arabia, despite his bad health, he worked tirelessly trying to bring about a compromise agreement between the EPLF and ELF. Although he was successful to hold several social meetings between the leaders of the two organizations, his attempts to reconcile the two antagonizing leaders never bore any fruit. Apprehensive of the failure of senior Eritrean leaders and notables to bring about the reconciliation of the different organizations, mainly the EPLF, the ELF-PLF and the ELF, he died in the eighties before realizing his dream and was buried in Jeddah.



----- *The End* -----

A wakeup call

Many countries in the world honor their heroes and commemorate them eternally by erecting statues, naming streets, parks, schools, universities and all sorts of institutions in their names. Eritrea has failed to remember its heroes in all spheres of life and fields including statesmanship, military, scholarships, arts, literature, religion, music and sports. It would be too long to list all the great Eritrean personalities from antiquity to the present. Even the heroes of the last 50 years who have not been recognized and honored are very many.

I believe many will agree with me that Eritrea has many amazing individuals in history who have done something unique to their country in the field of politics, culture, education, sport etc, which we need to remember them for what they have done. It is disheartening though not to see biography books of Eritreans in the library shelves. Lately I have decided to open a section in my website that will be dedicated to the biography of individual Eritreans from all walks of life in history (www.emnetu.com).

To start with I have randomly established a list of possible candidates. I therefore ask you all to put additional names to the list and return it to me. The list has to accommodate only individuals who have passed away. In other words we will concentrate only on post mortem biographies. I will update the list when I hear from you. The list will remain open all the time for additional names.

If you are positive about this idea and you have the time I would challenge you all to write biographical sketch or find individuals who can be interested to write a biography on any in the list. If you come across anyone who has access to information but not ready to write, you can ask him/her to supply the information to me in any format (paper, diskette, gramophone dish, cassette, videos, photographs etc) so that I can send it to the one who is interested to write.

The size of the file is not important at all. What is important is remembering them and trying to document their history before it disappears all together. The size will be determined only by the amount of information available on these individuals. Of course the individuals in the list must have done something positive to the cause of our country or to the well being of our people and our culture.

Emnetu Tesfay