

The Martyred King of Kings: Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia

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After Emperor Tewodros, Emperor Yohannes IV is another great visionary whose person is characterized by unparalleled altruism, incomparable sense of justice and humanist principle at its core. By his utmost commitment to his people and his country and his indefatigable patriotism, Yohannes makes every Ethiopian a dwarf-thinking animal.

Before Yohannes became emperor, his name was Kassa Mircha. Kassa was born on July 12 1837 at Mai Beha, Tembien to his father Shum Tembien Mirach and his mother Weizero Weleteslassie (Silas). Kassa traces his descent to the great lords of the Era of Princes, namely Ras Michael Sihul, Ras Woldeslassie, and Dejach Subagadis Woldu. His mother, Weizero Silas is the daughter of Dejach Dimtsu of Tembien and Weizero Tabotu of Agame. Incidentally, Embeytey Tabotu is the sister of Dejach Subagadis; and Ras Woldeslassie is the brother of Debeb, the grandfather of Kassa, and this sanguine and marriage relationship would make Kassa's legitimacy to power much easier given the complicated post-Era of Princes Ethiopian politics.

Kassa had an older brother named Gugsu and an elder sister by the name Dinknesh, who would later be married to Wagshum Gobezie Gebremedhin (Emperor Teklegioris) of Lasta, and Kassa's erstwhile nemesis in the power transition of the middle 19th century Ethiopia.

When Kassa Mircha was born, Kassa Hailu (Emperor Tewodros) was a fourteen-year old lad, but during this times the marauding hermit foretellers, in the Gonder and Tigray areas, had made predictions (as has always been the case in the Ethiopian tradition) that a certain Kassa will ascend to power and the parents of both Kassas apparently internalized the political forecast of the times and adopted the name of Kassa to their respective sons. On top of the name giving, Shum Tembien Mircha psychologically prepared his son by teaching him royal etiquette and skills to combat potential foes while his mother is believed to have fed her son a special food with some ingredients of several bitter herbs and aloe so that he become a strong and courageous man and also defy the conspiracies and subterfuge of his enemies. Legend has it that Weizero Silas deliberately prepared special diet for Kassa but this is more of folklore than a hard fact.¹

However, when Emperor Tewodros consolidated power beyond all doubt, Kassa Mircha entered service to the mighty Emperor and in return he was bestowed the title of Balambaras, the lowest rank in the Ethiopian aristocratic power structure. Kassa was dissatisfied with his title especially when Sahlemariam (Menelik II), eleven years younger than him, got the highest rank of Dejazmach, only two titles below Negus (king).

Thus, Kassa, now 27, decided to lead a rebel life against Tewodros, but because the latter was so powerful he retreated from his base area of Tembien and Enderta to the relatively remote areas of Irob and Afar in the Agame district. It is during his stay here that he "wedded" an Afar lady who was made to adopt a Christian name of Tibebelessie, and from whom he begot his son Lij Araya. In only five years, Kassa, now 32 became a formidable force in Tigray and confidently contested the power of king of kings against the self-appointed Emperor Teklegioris. In fact, by 1868-69, Kassa had well-armed and well-trained regiments, became a Dejazmach, and was ready to combat the forces of Teklegioris. In 1870, Teklegioris also mobilized his forces and had planned

to march on to Tigray but before the campaign began, his wife, Dinknesh admonished him as reflected in the following short Tigrigna poem:

**አንቱም ሰባት ናብ ዓድዋ አይትኸዱ
ብእሳተ ጎመራ ከይትነዱ
አባ በዝብዝ ካሳ ቆራጽ እያ ኸብዱ**

Teklegiorgis did not listen to his wife. He marched on to Adwa and confronted the forces of Kassa and he met defeat in the hands of his rival and he is believed to have been captured by Ras Alula, then with the title of Sahleqa. Following his defeat and his capture, Dinknesh again lamented in Amharic:

**ተናግራ ነበር እኔስ አስቀድሜ
አሁን ምን ልናገር ከሃዘን ላይ ቆሜ
የተሻረው ባሌ፡ ተሸሚው ወንድሜ
ከእንግዲህስ ወዲህ አልመኝም ዕድሜ**

After the defeat of Teklegiorgis, Kassa made necessary preparations for his official coronation. Before he ascended to the power of king of kings, however, in an effort to get support and recognition from outside Ethiopia, he had already dispatched letters to European powers. One of the letters he wrote to Louis Napoleon Bonoparte of France reads as follows:

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, this message is dispatched from Dejach Kassa, head of all dignitaries in Ethiopia. It is addressed to Louis Napoleon Bonoparte, the king of France. God appointed me on September. I could not send letters on September because I was hosting the English who came as my guests. I am the son of Bakkafa and Fassil; I am the son of these kings. I am the son of Michael and Woldeclassie.”²

In his letter, Kassa quite obviously mentioned the most powerful of his predecessors. Michael, incidentally, is Ras Michael Sihul. It seems to me, he mentioned Woldeclassie in his letter because the latter was in good terms with the French. Had he addressed the letter to Queen Victoria, he would probably have included the name of Subagadis, who was in good terms with the English and who had enjoyed the company and advice of Salt and Coffin.

Kassa himself was a good friend of the English and was even rewarded by General Napier with 12 mortars, 900 guns, and countless bullets after the fall of Tewodros. A year after he forbade good bye to Napier and long before he defeated Teklegiorgis, he had already sent Samuel Giorgis (interpreter during Tewodros) and Workie Mircha as his representatives in London. But after he defeated Teklegiorgis on July 12 1871, Kassa wrote the following letter to Queen Victoria:

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holly Spirit; message from Kassa, King of Kings of Ethiopia. Addressed to Queen Victoria of Britain... Thank you for your advice and your love, I am strong. I am very delighted. My rival Wagshum Gobeze came to my town Adwa and we fought; I defeated him; captured him with his soldiers and none of them escaped. All are captured and they are in my hands except Menelik of Shewa. By the power of God, I have put the entire Ethiopian government in my hands. Like our past friendship, don't forget me; sympathize with me. I too will not forget the friendship of the English government. I am still as I used to be.

Like my fathers and your fathers, you and I have befriended; I beg to be loved like the European kings.”³

After the defeat of Emperor Tekelgiorgis, for six solid months preparations were underway for Kassa Mircha’s coronation ceremonies. On January 28 1872, following centuries of Ethiopian tradition, Kassa was anointed as Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Aksum by Patriarch Abune Atnatewos. According to Muse G. Douin, following the coronation ceremony, a three-day festival continued, but according to an Ethiopian chronicler Aleka ZeYohannes, the festival was thirty days long. Based on the amount of food and drinks served to the dignitaries and the masses, however, Aleka ZeYohannes’ account could be right. As testified by Dioun himself, 4000 oxen were slaughtered and fifty big-size pots (the size of a barrel) of honey for 150,000 honey-wine glasses were presented.

The coronation festivities went well, but the major challenge for Emperor Yohannes, i.e. the reunification of Ethiopia that had begun in earnest by Tewodros, lies ahead of him. Yohannes had already made up his mind to deal with recalcitrant local powers from Hamassien to Shewa and furthermore south to Jimma.

One of the recalcitrant rivals was Ras Adal of Gojjam who was married to Weizero Laqech, the sister of Teklegiorgis (Wagshum Gobeze). But when Yohannes marched on to Gojjam for a show of force, Ras Adal made a rational assessment of his military prowess, which was by far inferior to that of Yohannes, and he retreated back to the jungle. Then, Yohannes appointed the former governor Dejach Desta with an additional rank of Ras and returned back to Mekelle. But Ras Adal fought Ras Desta, killed him in a battle and wrote a letter to Yohannes confirming to submit to him and pay tribute and also get clemency from the king of kings. Initially, Yohannes rejected Adal’s appeal but after learning that the Egyptians were making preparations to attack Ethiopia, and after he consulted with his advisors, he gave back Gojjam to Ras Adal.

Three years after the reign of Yohannes, the reunification process was once again interrupted by Egypt’s Khedive Ismael Pasha attempt to occupy Ethiopian territory. On March 1875, the Egyptian and Ethiopian forces took positions at Gundet. The Ethiopian army under the command of Sahleqa Alula surrounded the Egyptian forces on the left flank; Emperor Yohannes’ forces were on the right flank; in the middle and rear were several Rases, one of whom was Ras Woldemichael Solomon of Hazega/Hamassien.

The strategy Ethiopians employed at the battle of Gundet is known as ‘ox-horn strategy’ whereby the enemy is encircled but some space is allowed for retreat so that the rearguard or reinforcing regiments could capture the enemy troops in disarray. The battle of Gundet started at about 9 am and raged till 3 pm in the afternoon. Both sides fought bravely but the Ethiopians had clearly the upper hand, thanks to the “field advantage,” knowledge of the topography, their masterful combat tactics, and of course the support of the people.

The Egyptian army was virtually annihilated, several hundreds were captured, and others managed to escape. But again, after reorganizing their forces and recuperating from the nightmare of Gundet, they came back on November 1876 and another Ethio-Egyptian confrontation took place at Gura’e. This time, the son of Khedive Ismael, Hassen Pasha, led the Egyptian forces. And this time, Yohannes issued a proclamation, which reads in part: ‘an enemy has come to destroy Ethiopian sovereignty, and whose objective is to enslave our people, rape our women, and desecrate our religion. Hence, soldiers get ready with your weapons and priests pray in all the churches.’ This time, the Ethiopian forces altogether sixty thousand combatants were mainly from Tigray, Mereb Millash, Gonder, Gojjam, and Shewa.

Before the battle of Gura'e started, Emperor Yohannes gave instruction to various Rases as to how to wage the battle, but most importantly he emphasized that they need not underestimate the enemy. He was right! The Egyptian army was formidable indeed; the battle raged for a whole day, from dawn to dusk and till the Ethiopians engaged their enemies in a hand-to-hand combat. Finally, after thousands of men laid dead on either side, the Ethiopians won the day and Hassen Pasha run for his life but he was later captured and brought before the Emperor, along thousands of Egyptian prisoners of war. The emperor ordered that the POWs be treated with dignity but Hassan's arms were to be embossed (tattooed, in modern parlance) with two Ethiopian crosses. Finally, the Egyptian POWs were let go free via Massawa but Yohannes is believed to have sarcastically commented, "Make sure that you check their shoes so that they don't take the soil of my country!" Revisiting Yohannes' remarks, in April 2002, I wrote an article with respect to Ethiopian sovereignty and the demarcation controversy and opened my paper with "I am greedy for its land fragments, let alone for its territorial integrity (Emperor Yohannes IV)."

After the victory of Gura'e, Yohannes became so famous all over Ethiopia, parts of Africa, and Europe; and when he came back to his capital city, the priests and the people at large received him with ululation and jubilation. Soon after, a popular song dedicated to Yohannes was issued:

**ከላይ የወረደው ከጽዮን መቅደስ
ባባቱ ሚካኤል በናቱ ሥላሴ
አጨደው ከመረው ያን ያሕዛብ ገብስ
ወቃው ደበደበው ሰጠው ለነፋስ
ዓለሙ ነፍጠኛ አፄ ዮሐንስ⁴**

In light of foreign aggression against Ethiopia, recalcitrant local powers, and the fragile unity of the country, Yohannes made a shift in administrative policy. Instead of continuing the reunification of Ethiopia by employing coercion as Tewedros did, he considered 'sovereign' kings under the king of kings. Following the battle of Imbabo between Negus Teklehamanot (formerly, Ras Adal) and Menelik of Shewa, Yohannes reconciled the two rivals at the Berumeda conference on August 13 1874, but he also used this opportunity to penalize the disobedient kings, and hence find a pretext to establish a semi-federal system. Thus, he took Wollo from Menelik, divided it into two parts and gave half of it to his son Ras Araya and the other half to Ras Michael (formerly, Mohammed Ali); he took Agaw Midir from Negus Teklehaimanot and gave it to Ras Alula. Before Imbabo and Berumeda, however, Yohannes had already bestowed the title of Negus (king) to Menelik and Teklehaimanot.

Yohannes was aware that Menelik was the strongest from all his subordinates and he arranged a marriage relationship to secure Menelik's loyalty and strengthen his power base. Thus, he proposed that his son Lij Araya wed Menelik's daughter Zewditu. Menelik accepted the proposal gladly and the two of them established an unholy alliance, so to speak, via the holy matrimony of their children. And once they successfully wed Araya and Zewditu, Yohannes gave green light to Menelik to expand his territory to the south, namely to Jimma, Kaffa, Sidamo, Harar etc. Despite Jimma's autonomy, first awarded by Yoahannes himself, now the Abba Jifar would pay tribute to Menelik.

Yohannes successfully managed to pacify central, northern, and parts of southern Ethiopia, but he had yet to face foreign enemies encroaching on Ethiopian territory via Mereb Millash (now Eritrea). Thus, three years after the victory of Gura'e, i.e. in 1879 Yohannes bestowed the title of Ras to Alula and appointed him as governor of Mereb Millash.

Following his appointment, Ras Alula first settled at Adi Teklai, 20 km from Asmera but later on he established his capital at Asmera. Before the advent of Alula to Mereb Millash and the founding of Asmera, there were the quartet villages of Arba'ete Asmera and there is no doubt that the name 'Asmera' preceded Alula. However, Asmera as a capital city and an administrative center began with Alula. Alula's entourage and advisors who went with him from Tigray were Bilata Gebru Aba Chiqun, Dejach Engda (Aba Shawel), Shaleqa Araya, Dejasmach Hailelassie, Lij Fanta, Bashai Fanta, Bashai Tedla, Bashai Tedella (Wedi Millasu), Bashai Mersha, Bashai Desta (Aba Ga'e), and Bashai Asberella. Advisors from Mereb Millash include Bahri Negasi Godefa, Bashai Bokru, Zegergis, Gilagiorgis, Geberemedhin Zekarias, Tesfatsion Almedom, Kentiba Hagos, Dejasmach Hailu Abera, Hadgembes Gilbet, and Mengesha Asghedom.⁵

On top of Alula's advisors from Mereb Millash mentioned above, were also other prominent personalities from Hamassien including Dejasmach Hailu Teweldemedhin (Aba Habal) and Dejasmach Woldemichael Solomon (Aba Gomida). The home villages of Dejach Hailu and Dejach Woldemichael, i.e. Tsezega and Hazega respectively, are overlapping and adjacent districts in the heart of Hamassien, but due to power struggle the two were exclusive nemesis to each other. Dejach Hailu was a close associate and subordinate to Ras Kahsay Subagadis of Agame and both were loyal to Tewodros and opposed to Wube. Dejach Woldemichael was initially loyal to Emperor Yohannes and even fought with bravery at Gundet against the Egyptians. But before the battle of Gura'e ensued, he sensed that Yohannes would appoint Dejach Hailu as governor of Hamassien and he thus turned against Yohannes and sided with the Egyptians at Gura'e. Now, that his new allies were defeated at Gura'e he had no choice but to lead a rebel life and made necessary preparations to destroy Dejach Hailu.

Woldemichael was by far stronger in terms of arms and fellowship than his rival Hailu. At the battle of Wekiduba, Dejach Hailu was wounded and killed and Woldemichael was victorious. Yohannes Kolmedin, an expert on the sociology of Tsezega and Hazega, testifies the gruesome massacre of Hailu's captured troops by order of Woldemichael. Kolmedin also testifies the burning down of several villages including Tsezega, Adi Gebru, Adi Teklai, and Adi Kefelet, by order of Woldemichael. Woldemichael carried out same atrocities against the people of Maria Tselim and Maria Keyih.

Following the death of Dejach Hailu, Emperor Yohannes sent messengers to Woldemichael and told him, "despite your past crimes, I will forgive you if you submit to me." But, Woldemichael adamantly rejected (hence, *Embee Yale Woldu*) Yohannes' concessionary proposal and the Emperor had no choice but to appoint Ras Baryaw Gebretsadiq as governor of Hamassien. Again, Woldemichael confronted Baryaw at Biet Meka'e and the Ras, who was rather pompous and who truly underestimated Aba

Gomida, was shot and killed. But, despite his second victory (now with the rank of Ras given to him by the Egyptians), he carefully assessed his military prowess vis-à-vis Alula. He knew very well that he was no match to the latter and decided to surrender to Yohannes. He wrote a letter to Alula, which reads, "I have decided to submit to my king of kings and you help me reconcile with him." Alula replied by saying, "that is just fine; I will reconcile you and I swear in the name of God."

Following the peace dialogue, Woldemichael headed to Aksum to meet Alula and upon his arrival was given a warm welcome; both of them, in turn, headed to Debre Tabor where the Emperor stayed then. Here too, the Emperor gave Woldemichael a warm welcome and told him, "I have forgiven you and I have approved the title of Ras given to you by the Egyptians and you are appointed to serve with Ras Alula in Mereb Millash." Then, both Alula and Woldemichael went back to Akele Guzai and settled at Gura'e.

Alula had yet to pacify the areas of Bogos, Habab and Mensa'e and he asked Woldemichael to mobilize his forces and participate in the campaign. He said ok and both of them campaigned in the said areas, but for some reason Alula did not trust Woldemichael and he may have engineered a pre-planned downfall strategy of *Embee Yale Woldu*. Thus a certain Kentiba Hailu Gebrai (close relative of Woldemichael) testified in front of Alula and told Woldemichael on his face, "you have hid a part of your weapons at Massawa and a part in the monasteries." Under this charge, on September 1880, he was taken prisoner along with his sons Lij Hailemeleket and Dejach Mesfin.

Four years after the end of Aba Gomida, Alula's Mereb Millash was, by and large, pacified, and Emperor Yohannes successfully signed the Hewett or Adwa Treaty that recognized, among other things, the Bogos and Massawa areas (not to mention Hamssien, Seraye, and Akele Guzai) as part of Ethiopian territory. Meanwhile, Alula and his entourage successfully and peacefully governed Mereb Millash. Under Alula, the various districts were governed by *ChiqaShum* and *Mislene*, local governors and representatives (accountable to Alula); mounted authorities (police-like agents) were also entrusted to monitor the daily life of citizens; the people at large were given access to the court of Alula and in the event they wanted to file a complaint, they were permitted to ring the bell connected by a long leather rope to Alula's living room and then Alula would listen to their complaints; the bandits were counterchecked and eliminated by militias who operated in collaboration with the *Mislene*; Christianity and Islam were preached side by side, thanks to Alula's reconciling ability.

Unfortunately, however, the Hewett Treaty coincided with the Scramble for Africa by European powers following the Berlin Conference of 1884/85. Subsequently, the French took over Djibouti; the English colonized Egypt and Sudan, and the Italians, who managed to control Assab through the Rubbatino Shipping Company, have now settled at Massawa just when the Berlin Conference was concluded.

Yohannes was destined to confront local, regional, and European powers. When the Italians began amassing their forces in the Massawa area, in an attempt to resolve the problem diplomatically, he dispatched messages of peace to the Italians but to no avail. Meantime, Alula campaigned against Osman Digna of the Dervish in 1885 and destroyed

his forces at Kufit. After the defeat of Digna, Alula descended to the Massawa area to confront the Italian forces. At Sehati, the first battle with the Italians, although there was huge casualty on either side, the Ethiopian loss was greater. Learning from the setbacks of Sehati, thus, the great general Ras Alula came up with a better strategy to encircle the Italians at the battle of Dogali in 1887. Ras Alula also enjoyed great support from other Ethiopian commanders and the king of kings himself. In fact, before Yohannes went to Sehati, he appealed to all Ethiopians by the following proclamation: “Oh the sons of Ethiopia; observe with care; the country called Ethiopia is, first, your mother; second, your throne; third, your wife; fourth, your child; fifth, your grave. Therefore, rise up with the understanding that the love of a mother and respect of a throne, the goodness of a wife, the delight of having a child, and the shelter of a grave.” With the content of the proclamation in mind the Ethiopians fought bravely under Alula and Dogali witnessed a major Ethiopian victory and the Italians were virtually annihilated.

On his way back from Sehati and during his brief stay in Asmera, the Emperor was informed that the Dervish defeated Negus Teklehaimanot at Sar Wuha. Without any respite, thus, he ordered the mobilization of his army and headed toward Metema where the Dervish troops were garrisoned. The chief commanders, who accompanied the Emperor, were Ras Araya Dimtsu, Ras Mengesha, Ras Hagos, Ras Alula, Ras Hailemariam, and Ras Michael of Wollo. The Dejazmach and Fitewrari (vanguard) commanders were in hundreds and the total number of the fighting forces was 150,000 strong.

The battle of Metema took place on March 1889, and although the Ethiopians had the upper hand and almost defeated the Dervish, the Emperor was shot and wounded. Some chroniclers say, ‘the emperor stepped down from his mule and while fighting in the fore front, he was shot.’ Others contend that he was actually hit by a bullet from behind; still others argue that a “friendly” fire shot his right arm. We may never know!

In any event, before Yohannes passed away, he asked his lieutenants to call his nephew Dejach Hailemariam Gugsu, but they told him that he was wounded and he couldn’t come. That was another way of saying ‘he is dead,’ but the Emperor understood the metaphor and asked for Ras Menegesha Gugsu, his other nephew, to come before him. He then made his will clear to all the dignitaries: “My son Mengesha is my successor to the throne.” He did not say my nephew, and ever since the Ras was known as Mengesha Yohannes.

After the Emperor passed away on March 9, 1889, the commanders put his body in a coffin and headed to Tigray via Atbara (Tekezze). The Dervish spies who followed their trek informed their commanders of the whereabouts of the retreating Ethiopian chiefs and ultimately they found them. A skirmish ensued and in the middle of the shoot out the brave Ethiopians who fought to the last drop became sacrificial lambs; among them were Ras Araya Dimtsu, the Emperor’s uncle; Bitwedded Gebremeskel, Dejach Tedlla, and other priests and dignitaries. The Dervish then managed to seize the body of Yohannes; they beheaded him and took his head to Omdurman for a trophy display.

For the martyred king of kings, the great Emperor Yohannes IV, as was in the Ethiopian tradition and as expected, the Ethiopians came out with subtle and metaphoric poem in the form of eulogy:

አጼ የሐንስ ሞኝ ናቸው
እኛም ሁላችን ናቸናቸው፤
ንጉሥ ቢልዋቸው በመኻሉ
ወሰን ጠባቂ ልሁን አሉ፤
አጼ የሐንስ በጣም ይዋሻሉ
መጠጥ አልጠጣም እያሉ
ሲጠጡ አይተናል በርግጥ
ራስ የምያዞር መጠጥ፤
በጎንደር መተኮስ
በደንብያ መታረድ አዝኖ የሐንስ
ደሙን አፈሰሰ እንደ ክርስቶስ፤
እንዳያምረው ብሎ ድሃ ወዳጁን
መተማ አፈሰሰው የሐንስ ጠጁን፤
የጎንደር ኃይማኖት ቆማ ስታለቅስ
አንገቱን ሰጠላት ዳግማይ የሐንስ።⁶

Concluding remarks: In my article about Emperor Tewodros, I have reminded the reader that it is absolutely essential to make a fair and square assessment of Ethiopian history and its leaders. I have done the same evaluation to Yohannes IV, but the latter too could not escape criticism from other writers and historians. As we must necessarily develop critical social thought, critical inquiry should be embraced at all levels and at all times. However, some writers could have a misperception of the times and misconception of Yohannes and his policy in running political affairs. Some, for instance, argue that Yohannes was anti-Moslem and he even declared Ethiopia a solely Christian nation. As I have argued in my book, *Ethiopia: The Political Economy of Transition* (1995)⁷ there is no doubt that Yohannes was in favor of one Christian religion and this is certainly wrong. In fact when Ethiopian Moslems were forcibly converted to Christianity, some of them fled the country to Sudan and these same Ethiopian refugees were the vanguards that came along with the Dervish to Metema. But, Yohannes did not order the conversion of Moslems without reason. Long before Metema, Gura'e and Gundet, Khedive Ismael ordered the conversion of Christians in the Habab, Bogos, Mensa'e and Massawa areas. And the dervish, in effect, wrought a Jihad war against Ethiopia. If we see the controversy over religion in light of the above historical facts, we may not completely absolve Yohannes from his "fanaticism" but we could certainly sympathize with him.

When it comes to his vision, sense of justice and patriotism, however, as I have stated at the beginning of this essay, Yohannes definitely makes us look like dwarf thinking animals, and this is why: When the English were trying to arbitrate between the Emperor and the Italians after Dogali and suggested that he grants land possession to the Italians in

lieu of protection of European powers, he dismissed their ideas by saying, “I have neither the wish nor the authority to hand over a fragment of my country’s land to colonialists.” Similarly, in his reply to Queen Victoria’s letter with same intentions, he simply said, “I can’t relinquish what God gave me.”

Challenging his contemporary dignitaries and nobilities on the making of the Ethiopian nation and the necessity of elevating beyond narrow nationalism, this is what Yohannes the visionary and the patriot had to say: “An enemy is not just the one that comes and grabs our land; it is also the foe that corrupts our culture and social system by creating half castes. You must understand, what we call our country is from Massawa to Atbara; from Berbera to Gedarif; from Gambella to Kassala. This is our country Ethiopia. I am enraged when they touch my Ethiopia that I always think of when I pray and read the Songs of David. Those Ethiopian dignitaries, who think that Ethiopia for them is the local territory they preside over, must liberate themselves from their narrow thinking and must acknowledge that there was and is great Ethiopia.”

Yohannes’ challenge to his contemporaries is relevant to the present generation of Ethiopians as it was a century and two decades ago!!

Notes and sources:

1. In his dramatic-novel entitled *Yohannes*, Mamo Widneh actually states that Weizero Silas used to give *Fieto* and *Abish*, respectively used by nursing mothers and for strengthening and cleansing the body.
2. D. Abbadie, Dessiers d’Antoine D’Abbadie (Bib. Nat. Paris) No. 28-164 (quoted in Tekeletsadiq Mekuria, *Emperor Yohannes and the Unity of Ethiopia*)
3. Public Record Office, London, Fol (28) 121133, p. 197, Ibid
4. Tekletsadiq Mekuria, *Ethiopian History: From Emperor Tewodros to Emperor Hailesleasie*
5. Belai Ghidye Amha, *Askum*
6. The word ‘Dagmai’ both in Amharic and Tigrigna literally means ‘second’ as in Menelik II; if taken literally, it would not apply to Yohannes IV (the fourth), but the metaphor embedded in the word connotes ‘duplication’ and/or ‘repeatedness’ to indicate that Yohannes, after Tewodros, again sacrificed his life for his country
7. Ghelawdewos Araia, *Ethiopia: The Political Economy of Transition*

N.B. Other important bibliography on Yohannes are: 1) Zewde Gebreslassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975; 2) Bairu Tafla, *A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes the IV (1872-1889)*, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH.WLESBADEN, 1977

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