



The controversial Anoole and Haile Selassie monuments as reflecting the religious and political tensions between Christians and Muslim Ethiopians

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Abstract

Statues referring to history are expressions of the collective conscience of nations or groups in a nation, and therefore their value is determined by the changing policies and altering concepts of such nations or groups. Ethiopia, the only African nation without a real colonial past *sensu stricto*, presents some characteristic examples. Crowned in the Orthodox Tewahedo Church's Cathedral in Addis Ababa, Emperor Haile Selassie's reign (1916/1930 - 1975), fall and murder are well known. He was the last of the so-called Solomonic line, beginning with Sheba and Menelik I, the son she had from King Solomon. Haile Selassie became anathema and was regarded as an outdated dictator, belonging to the colonial period. However, a statue of the emperor was erected outside the African Union's headquarters in Addis Ababa, but it soon also became controversial. Another very controversial statue was erected in Hetosa, Oromo, in 2014 and is known as the Anoole statue. It was also a remembrance of the past and refers to the acts of one of the most glorious emperors of Modern Ethiopian history, Menelik II, who wished to restore Ethiopian unity by bringing all old territories back under the crown. The Oromo group, a non-Semitic, largely non-Christian-Orthodox ethnic group resisted such unification. The emperor reacted by persecuting the Oromos in 1886, using an old Ethiopian traditional way of punishment, i.e. to cut the right breasts of women and right hands of men.

Keywords: Arsi Anoole memorial, Haile Selassie statue, modern Ethiopian history, religious tensions in Ethiopia, Oromo.

Introduction

Ethiopia is one of the exceptional countries in Africa priding itself about its long history and culture going back to Antiquity. Moreover, it is one of the oldest Christian countries in the world, and arguably the only African country that was never colonised *sensu stricto* (Dugan & Lafore, 1973:315-316; Rubenson, 1976:1-5). Its rich heritage is expressed in written documents, literature, music, traditions, a magnificent, mystical and religious iconography in



its Miaphysite¹ Orthodox churches as well as statues referring to its history. Its culture and heritage have been and still are highly admired by scholars (Ullendorff, 1960:1-22, 194).

Statues referring to the history of the Ethiopian people – in its varieties - are expressions of its common historical conscience or of the different nations and groups which had made up the population since the great empire of Axum, the most ancient Christian Kingdom (Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972:92-93; Sundkler & Steed, 2000, 1038). All these tribes and nations differentiated by language, culture, and religion today form part of the Republic of Ethiopia. Their art including their statues symbolic value is therefore determined by the changing political regimes, policies, and altering concepts of such nations or groups² as well as by religious tensions between Christian and Muslims (Henze, 2000:339-343).

In our paper, we will concentrate on two recent examples of monuments (statues) in Ethiopia, put in what may be seen as a 'quasi- or pseudo- colonial' context and the final revival and phase of the old Amharic Solomonic Imperium ideal. We apply the methodology of historical criticism, adapted – in our case – to the Ethiopian context, which contemporary Ethiopian researchers have labelled as being enigmatic, because of the so-called *Gibbonism*, including the colonial and racial prejudices of the previous centuries and a backward-looking conception of progress and reliance on the Newtonian theory of social change. The acceptance of *Gibbonism* by the modern Ethiopian intellectuals has led to the practice of writing and understanding Ethiopianism in the Western way with a radical and absolute disengagement from Ethiopia's intellectual traditions, such as the legends and chronicles, which emanated from a deep understanding of the value of the conceptions and historical Ethiopian traditional knowledge. The Solomonic *Kebra Nagast* and the royal and Orthodox traditions are still important factors (Odomaro Mubangizi, 2020; Messay Kedebe, 1999; Maimire Mennasemay, 2020; Solomon Gebreyes Beyene, 2019). Already earlier, some European and American scholars, such as Spaulding (1995:577-578), have underlined the differences in approaching North-East Africa following a Western *versus* an Oriental (Islamic) way, the latter's purpose being "to justify before the law the actions of early and succeeding generations of Islamic leaders". He thereby stresses the fact that the perspective from which such research should start, should be an African one. Therefore, we have treated our sources (works of Western scholars from the nineteenth to the twenty first centuries and contemporary Ethiopian publications) with the needed prudence regarding their interpretation of the 'facts' they present and their 'judgements'.

Two recent examples of controversial Ethiopian statues with religious and historical-political messages

Both examples relate to the role of at least two great emperors in Ethiopia's modern and recent history, Menelik II (1889 -1913 CE) and Haile Selassie I (1930-1936 and 1941-19745 CE), strongly framed by two other emperors, Tewodros II (1855-1868) and Yohannes IV (1871-1889). These Emperors' reigns and fall are well known. They were the last of the so-called Solomonic line, beginning – according to legend and official Axumite doctrine – with the Biblical Queen of Sheba and Menelik I, the son she had from King Solomon. This belief is embodied in the fourteenth Century epic *Kebra Nagast*, which can be characterized as an Ethiopic "*Israelite-Christian Dynastic and National Epic*" (Hendrickx, 2012:21-33; Hendrickx, 2019), but which has been rejected as a book of value for Africa by Mamman Musa Adamu (2009: 468-482), because according to him, it is un-African and negates Ethiopia's splendid

¹ The Ethiopian and Coptic Churches called themselves Orthodox but were miaphysite and not dyophysite. In our article we also refer to them as Orthodox.

² For the enumeration of these nations and groups, representing or constituting different peoples, populations and tribes, living in today's Ethiopia, and their sizes, see Henze (2000:214, 291,341-2). For a discussion of their origin and integration in the old Ethiopian empire throughout its history and variations, see Hendrickx (1984:36-43 (early *ethne*), 57-60) and Ullendorff (1960:31-46). Tension and consequent wars were common and known since the earliest times of the Christian era.

heritage, binding it to the Jews and supporting the so-called Hamitic theory as opposite to the ideology of *négritude*.



Figure 1. Statue of Haile Selassie

Haile Selassie, who built his power on the Solomonic theory as found in the *Kebra Nagast*, became an anathema in Ethiopia itself, because of his authoritarian rule, and was regarded as an outdated dictator, belonging to the so-called colonial period (Clapham, 1988:223-225; Yohannes Woldemariam, 2019; *BBC News*, 2019). However, after having experienced and rejected their new 'liberty' created by the DERG (and successor regimes), somehow the Ethiopians returned to their traditional national pride (Clapham, 1988:244-258; Henze, 2000:283-333). Recently, a statue of the last emperor (Figure 1) was erected outside the African Union's headquarters in Addis Ababa, but soon it also gave rise to controversy because of this emperor's authoritarian rule and Christian Amharic imperial style of governing.

Earlier, another 'new' monument, known as the Anoole memorial statue (Figure 2) was erected in Hetosa, Oromo. This monument is also a remembrance of the past and refers to the acts of one of the most glorious emperors of Modern Ethiopian history, Menelik II (1889-1913), an autocrat ruler wishing to restore Ethiopia to its ancient glory and bring all old territories back under his crown. The Oromo group, a non-Semitic and greatly non-Christian and non-Orthodox ethnic group resisted such unification, mainly because they were an ethnic different people with another religion, language and culture (Henze, 2000:151-152). The emperor reacted



Figure 2. Anoole Statue

by persecuting the Oromos in 1886, using an old Ethiopian traditional way of punishment, i.e. to cut the right breast of women and right hand of men. The Oromo population underwent this punishment on a massive scale³. Only in 2014, after years of resentment and opposition were they granted a form of compensation in the shape of a statue which recognised their suffering from Menelik's cruelty. They were provisionally appeased, but their opposition to the crown soon started to grow. Today's Prime Minister, Dr Ably Ahmed, is a Muslim Oromo, but the tension between Christians and Oromo continues.

These different Ethiopian sculptures have been representing opposed political and religious groups with strong reactions to their corresponding past. Their statues have been articulating a particular form of religious 'decolonisation', which together with 'post-colonial' concepts and their own symbolism will be discussed and analysed in the following sections.

The religious and historical contents behind the two monuments

The history of modern Ethiopia conventionally begins with the ending of the so-called *Zemene Mesafint*, i.e. the 'Era of the Princes', a period of decentralisation of the powerless Empire of Gondar, led by weak rulers in the era of the *Mesafint* also known as 'the period of the judges'⁴ (Ullendorff, 1960:78-82; Rubenson, 1976:136-140; Kofi Darkwah, 1975:35-56; Pankhurst, 1998:150-154; Henze, 2000:119-124). Tewodros II was originally one of the princes, who tried to restore order and rebuild a strong monarchy. He imprisoned the Shewa prince, Menelik (the future emperor) in Magdala, and took over his throne as well as his *Negus* title. He succeeded in repressing the rebellions against him, bringing peace to Ethiopia between 1861 and 1863. He modernised the government and administration, paid salaries to his officials, organised a library and introduced a professional army (Rubenson, 1976:172-223).

³ See further (*infra*) in this article for discussion and analysis.

⁴ This period begun with the death of Iyasu II in 1755 and ended with the crowning of Tewodros II in 1855. During the *Mesafint* there were twenty-eight formal reigns, with several depositions followed by restorations. The previous Gondar empire had produced some important and highly competent rulers, such as Fasilidas (1632-1667), Yohannes I (1667-1682), Iyasu the Great (1682-1706) and Bakaffa (1721-1730). His successor Iyasu II, nicknamed 'the Little' (1730-1755), was totally incompetent and so was his son, Tekle Haymanot II (1769/70-1777). The central administration ceased to function and local rulers and centres outside Gondar took the occasion to grab power, while rebellions started all over the country.



In 1855, Tewodros tried to subdue the Oromo in order to create a united state. After the death of his wife, Tewabech, his behaviour became cruel and revengeful, ordering the killings of prisoners and rebels. In October 1862, he had to cope with an Islamic onslaught by the Turks and the Egyptians. Tewodros then sent a letter to Queen Victoria, but its delivery was sabotaged by the British, who collaborated with the Ottoman Turks and chose not to support Ethiopian Christendom (Rubenson, 1976:232-268; Bates, 1979:48-74; Henze, 2000:137-138). Tewodros quarrelled with the British and he imprisoned the British Consul and numerous other foreigners at his court. This led to Tewodros being considered as an uncivilised barbarian. Attacked by the English, the fortress of Magdala was destroyed and – in order not to be taken into captivity – Tewodros II committed suicide in April 1868 (Bates, 1979:93-202; Pankhurst, 1998:160-161; Henze, 2000:138-143).

After Tewodros's death, there were three pretenders. In Gondar, the local leader, named Gabaze, crowned himself as emperor Tekle Giorgis III, but he died on 21 January 1872. Menelik II, having escaped from Tewodros's prison in Magdala, was the second one and was inspired by Tewodros's dream of a modern Ethiopia. The third one was Yohannes IV who did much to achieve Tewodros's aim of reunification.

Yohannes IV, in his turn, had to fight the onslaught of the Egyptians, whom he defeated twice during 1875. Ethiopia and Egypt eventually signed the so-called Adwa Peace treaty, by which Ethiopia could finally recover its lost territories. The British, meanwhile, continued their own peculiar and selfish politics, convincing the Italians to occupy Massawa and some other places, which, however, were once again regained by Yohannes's troops. The British became the arbiters between the two parties, Italians and Ethiopians, and demanded from the Ethiopian Emperor an apology to the Italians. In 1888 the Muslim troops of the infamous Mahdi, the Dervishers from the Sudan, burned the old capital of Gondar and in the same year Yohannes was killed in the battle of Metemma. On 25 March 1889 Menelik II proclaimed himself emperor (Bahru Zewde, 1991:54-56; Pankhurst, 1998:161-163; Henze, 2000:148-154).

Menelik II reigned as *Negus* (King) of Shewa from 1866 to 1889 and as emperor of Ethiopia from 1889 until 12 December 1913, when his death, firstly kept a secret, was officially announced (Jenny, 1957:60). His reign was marked by great territorial expansions in order to recover all lands, which had once belonged to the empire of Axum, but also by his military successes against the Italians and by his important modernisations. As a result, Menelik is regarded as the greatest reformer of the Ethiopian Empire. His glorious victory over the Italians in the battle of Ad(o)wa (1 March 1896) brought him respect and fame (Dugan & Lafore, 1973:5-11; Rubenson, 1976:399-406; Bahru Zewde, 1991:76-84; Kofi Darkwah, 1975:75-110). Strengthened by his victory at Ad(o)wa, Menelik II planned a territorial expansion in the Nile Region and, he tried - unsuccessfully – to make an alliance with the French, who had occupied a fort in Fashoda in Sudan (today Kodok), but who later abandoned it to the British. After the French withdrawal, Menelik signed in March 1902 a treaty with the British abandoning, thus, his plans in the region and promising not to change the course of any of the Nile waters without British permission (Lewis, 1988; Pakenham, 1991:527-538).⁵ He founded Addis Ababa in 1887, instigated relations with Russia, further modernised the Church, built a railway line to Djibouti and restored the Ethiopian mint which had been abandoned in the seventh century. He is remembered by many, if not by most of his own people, as a kind man and capable ruler, forgiving his enemies and helping the poor, while some regarded him as a 'black Bismarck' (Jenny, 1957:49-61). His expeditions brought many

⁵ The course of the Nile and its waters as well the important Tana Lake, considered by the Ethiopians as the 'Tsana Bahr' (the Holy Lake or Sea) was since the Middle Ages an important bone of contention between the Muslims from Egypt and Christian Ethiopians. The quarrel over water is continuing today but the Ethiopian Muslims have united with the Ethiopian Christians on this issue (Jenny, 1957:68-78; di Nunzio, 2013: 1-9; Addis Getachew and Seleshi Tessema, 2020).



outlying regions into the Empire, and most of these had been cut off for centuries. However, as we shall see, his kindness was not distributed among the Oromo people.

After Menelik's demise, there was again an impasse. Lij Iyasu, the grandson of Menelik and heir to the throne, remained the uncrowned emperor from 1913 to 1916, when he was deposed because of his flirtation with Islam. On 11 February, Menelik's daughter, Zewdita, was crowned empress and was expected to rule through Tafari Makonnen, who was her regent from 1916 to 1930. After a troubled regency, Tafari was crowned *Negus* (King) on 7 October 1928 by a hostile empress (Akpan, Jones & Pankhurst, 1990:304-305, 308-309). Finally, after an unsuccessful coup against Tafari directed by the empress herself, he was crowned and anointed – according to the Solomonic Ethiopian Orthodox rite – as Emperor Haile Selassie I, immediately after the death of Zewdita on 2 November 1930 in the Cathedral of St George in Addis Ababa (Waugh, 2005⁶; Jenny, 1957:66-67), after which the new emperor continued in a slow and prudent way Menelik's reforms and modernisation. Haile Selassie had already travelled in the Middle East and visited Jerusalem and many west European capitals in 1924. Soon after his coronation, the Fascist Italians of Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935. Although the emperor was recognised by the League of Nations, the Italian aggression continued. The Ethiopian armies were defeated several times and the emperor with his family went into exile, mainly in Jerusalem and England. On 5 May 1941, the East African Campaign succeeded, with the support of the British, the famous 'Gideon Force' as well as free Ethiopian troops, mixed forces from the Commonwealth, and free Belgian and French troops defeated the Italians in Ethiopia and the Emperor entered his capital in triumph (Talbot, 1955; Bahru Zewde, 1991:150-177).

Haile Selassie, furthermore, tried in vain to reorganise the payment of tax according to modern guidelines between 1942 and 1951. He succeeded in making the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church independent from Egypt and the Patriarch of Alexandria, Kyrillos VI, and he upgraded the bishop of Ethiopia to Patriarch-Catholicos, who nevertheless remained associated with Alexandria. Ethiopia took part in the Korean War (1950-1953) and he vigorously promoted decolonisation in Africa. However, troubles began in Eritrea (see details in Pankhurst & Pankhurst, 1953), which in 1961 began an independence war against Ethiopia. Haile Selassie became member of the Non-Aligned (Third world) Movement in 1961 and presided over the organisation of African Unity in 1963. Because of his great statesmanship, he was honoured by many foreign states and world leaders (Talbo, 1955). From 1930 onward, he was also highly admired by the Rastafari Movement, which had started in Jamaica, perceiving him to be an African Messiah (Palmer, 2007:21-24).

Haile Selassie stayed active in international politics during the 1970s, but the abuse of human rights remained a dark side in his '*palmares*' (*record of achievements*). During 1972-74, Wollo in north-east Ethiopia was ravaged by a huge famine, killing 10,000s of people. These negative factors provoked a reaction from parts of the army, which eventually led to the revolution of February 1974. The emperor was imprisoned in the palace of Addis Ababa and the disastrous Derg (the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, a Communist Marxist-Leninist military junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987) took over (Henze, 2000:283-333) under Mengestu Haile Mariam and the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was proclaimed. Finally, Haile Selassie was strangled on 28 August 1975. The Derg was replaced in 1991 by another (milder) socialist regime professing democracy, the EPRDF (Ethiopian People Revolution Democratic Front) (Bahru, 1991; Marcus, 1994) under Meles Zenawi and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was established and organized into semi-autonomous ethnically-based regions and also authorities.

⁶ Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966) wrote in 1935 his "Coronation of Haile Selassie". Waugh was a comic genius and his account is a satire of the emperor's coronation, his behaviour, and his modernizations. His text reflects the generally low opinion the English showed for Ethiopia and its Christianity. The text has no historic value as such.



The overview presented above has briefly shown that Ethiopia's modern history, not unlike its former history and even this of the old civilisation of Axum, was engineered through wars, revolts and tensions between leaders as well as individual tribes and groups, often defined by their religious beliefs. The entrance into the modern world did not bring relief, but rather opened up further struggles and misery, notwithstanding the great and sincere attempts of the *neguses* (kings) to transform their country into a strong, respectable, and workable unit, which would reflect the glorious deeds and culture of the past. Next to the Oromo and Haile Selassie monuments, many works of art were created during the last centuries especially reflecting on the period from the end of the nineteenth Century until today. Such works include paintings celebrating the victories of the Ethiopian armies over the Muslims (Arabs, Turks and indigenous groups) and the Italians.

The Arsi Anoole monument and the Haile Selassie statue: analysis and comparison

Let us start with the older one, the so-called Anoole statue of the Oromos. Anoole is referring to the place which was "a symbolic site of Arsi power", where the *Gad(a)a* system⁷ was practiced for probably more than five hundred years. In his analysis of the Oromo nation's ethnogenesis, Keller (1995:621-634) has stated that the Oromos, who probably comprise 40-50% of today's population in Ethiopia, originally came – according to their own tradition - from the southern highlands of Ethiopia, wherefrom they migrated in all directions. Though the Oromos did not form neither a state nor a 'pure' ethnic group, they had their own religion and had culturally assimilated – often by force – other groups which they had conquered to adapt their customs. Trying to defeat and conquer each other, the historic Christian Amhara were their main enemies.

The Anoole statue is a strong and emotional remembrance of the past and negatively refers to the 'war crimes' of the most glorious emperor in Modern Ethiopian history. The Anoole Statue was inaugurated on 6 April 2014 in Hetosa in Oromia by the local Regional Government as a tribute to the Arsi Oromo victims of Menelik II. Its construction had cost 20 million birr (US\$ 574,480.60). The enormous Anoole memorial depicts the right hand of a male, holding in its centre a cut female breast (Muluaem Daba Tola, 2017:43-49), representing the method used by Emperor Menelik II to punish men and women during his push to make the Oromos accept his monarchic rule in 1889. It is remarkable that Menelik II had forbidden this practice of mutilation at the battle of Ad(o)wa in 1896, at least in the case where his prisoners were Europeans (Dugan & Lafore 1973:10).

The Anoole monument is the most known and perhaps the most representative among the diverse commemorative statues of the post Selassie-period, such as these for the remembrance of the martyrs of the Amhara in Bahir Dar, and others for the Oromo and Tigray people in Adama and Mekelle. The Ethiopian scholar, Muluaem Daba Tola, has examined the thesis and antithesis, i.e. the pro and the contra arguments regarding the erection of the Anoole statue, which he bases mainly on the opposition of the two major groups in Ethiopia, the historic Christian Amhara and the relative newcomers, the Oromo, most of them (60%) being Muslims. Muluaem Daba Tola (2017:44-45) uses for his explanation and discussion the works of other scholars (such as Cohen), documents from state agencies, writings in

⁷ Keller (1995:624) explains as follows: "At any one time, there existed five Gada 'parties' or generation groups, and once in the system it took each 40 years to complete the cycle of eight calendar-year periods... At each stage, the members were educated in Oromo history, military strategy, law, and governance. Every eight years they moved from one Gada level to the next, and a nine-member presidium entering the highest was elected based on adult male suffrage. They were retired after serving as leaders but continued to act as advisers." – Cf. also Mulalem Daba Tola (2017:46), who repeats the definition of Keller.



several journals and interviews of individuals, even a popular praise song of Menelik II by the Ethiopian singer Tewodros Kassahun.

Mulualem Daba Tola (2017:46) refers to the declaration of the Oromo politician, Ato Muktar Kedir, stating that “*the erection of this memorial monument is to commemorate those Oromo heroes and heroines who were cruelly massacred for strongly resisting the oppressive regime [of Menelik]*”. Mulualem Daba Tola further details the fact that the Oromos became serfs and that their political system of electing their leaders, according to the *Gad(a)a* system (a custom known as *Arsooma*), was destroyed and replaced by Menelik’s *Neftegna* (‘Gun-barer’) system. The emperor, supported by Oromo people who had integrated into the Amhara nation, used the mutilation of breasts and hands in order to humiliate the Oromos and to oblige them to accept Christian Orthodoxy and the Amhara language and culture, to which he refers as ‘Abyssinian’, like the ethnos of Axum. The emperor’s actions also included the pillaging of the Oromo people, some of whom declared that the atrocity of cutting hands and breasts was “*needed to traumatize the people never [to] protest against the regime [of the emperor]*”.

For his antithesis, Mulualem Daba Tola (2017:47-48) refers to the many Ethiopians who supported Menelik, and he accepts that this emperor indeed did a lot for Ethiopia and its unification, stressing however, that these nations that supported Menelik, were the offshoots of the old Christian kingdom and the Abyssinian territories. Mulualem Daba Tola further returns to his defence of the erection of the Anoole statue as a memorial “*which deconstructs the taken for granted narratives of the reign of Menelik II [which] is taken for unauthentic history*” (sic). Nevertheless, Mulualem Daba Tola (2017:48) also pays attention to criticism against what some labelled as “*identity presentation fallacy*”, the fact that the statue represented negative history, a lack of artistic quality and – even worse – the fact that the statue “*inculcates hatred and vengeance rather than forgiveness and peaceful coexistence among the society*”.

In his article, Mulualem Daba Tola has missed the symbolic references by Menelik’s massacre to ancient Axumite and Ethiopian traditions and practice. Indeed, the ritual of cutting or mutilating the right breast is already found in the punishment and humiliation, undergone by the allegedly Jewish Queen Gudit of Axum, who persecuted in the tenth Century the Christians of her empire (Andersen, 2000; Hendrickx, 2018; Steyn, 2019). There are also other Ethiopian contexts, such as for transforming girls into amazons, as testified by Father Joano dos Santos, who visited Abyssinia as a missionary in 1606:

“In the neighbourhood of Damute ... [women] are much more daring than the men of the country, and ...[because] they may have no impediment to the proper exercise of their right arm, they are accustomed, while their daughters are young, to scar the breast of that [=right] side with a hot iron, and thus wither it to prevent growth.”
(Pinkerton 1814:722).

While Shalva Weil (2009), Tseday Alehegn (2007) and Raita Steyn (2019) have also referred to the theme of violence and strength exercised against and also by Ethiopian women, we have also portrayed this factor in a sexist context, the cutting of the breast being seen symbolically as the taking away the women’s femininity.

Hostile critics of the Arsi Anoole monument have not only denounced its political message, but also its artistic merit, describing it as an “*ugly contraption ... sitting in the middle of [the] acacia forest*” and as “*... such a strong and ugly visual in such a serene place*” (Yilma Bekele, 2014). However, these critics have made the mistake of not connecting the monument with the so-called traditional “*Arsi Tomb Art*” and its evolution in the past. Thus, Henze (2005:178) has published an article on exactly this theme. He has remarked that the “*oldest type of burial site on the Arsi Plateau is a circular enclosure on the open plain, usually marked by upright*



slabs, with a square tomb in center made of rough fieldstones.” The slabs are often carved and, in many cases, when there is more than one tomb, the central one stands as presenting the head of the (extended) family. Older burial sites are often situated at the edge of a wood or forest. This corresponds with the situation of the Arsi Anoole, which is also to be regarded as a remembrance burial site of a group (or community), and partly disarms the critique against this monument, which in fact appears to be in line with tradition, which from simple individual tombs evolved to monumental ones in the twentieth Century. The sites show in general a strong Muslim influence in devising and script (Henze, 2005:180-191). The reaction, in favour or against the statue of Emperor Haile Selassie, refers to the themes of freedom, anti-colonialism and decolonisation, although seemingly its function is the opposite of the Anoole one.

The erection of Selassie’s monument symbolises gratitude, recognition, admiration and glorification, and like the Anoole monument, denotes the rejection of colonialism and the embrace of a post-colonial reality steeped in the promotion and the pride of independence, self-determination, respect for traditional Orthodoxy and for the ideals for which Haile Selassie had lived, or realities and concepts against which he had fought and had deserved the admiration of other countries and their leaders. Controversially and – within the framework of the period - astonishing, however, Haile Selassie and in general the Christian Amhara have been accused by the Oromo of being ‘colonialists’ because of their policy of unifying Oromia with (Amharic) Ethiopia. This rather bizarre accusation, may perhaps be a late result from Menelik’s post-Ad(o)wa’s desire for territorial expansion in the Nile Region, then an alliance with the French in the fort of Fashoda, and finally with the British (Lewis, 1988:8, 11-12; Pakenham, 1991:527-538). The British and later the American domination of Ethiopia in practically all facets of life (1941-1974), which led to several revolts and finally to the monarchy’s fall, were often regarded – especially by students – as a form of colonialism (Bahru Zewde, 1991:179-189).

The academic, Yohannes Woldemariam, a radical critic of Haile Selassie, has argued that Haile Selassie “*should be remembered as a dictator*” and that history books should “*expose the truths of Haile Selassie’s 44-year reign over Ethiopia*” (Yohannes Woldemariam, 2019). Haile Selassie who like Menelik II is partly Oromo by blood, also remains accused because of what some consider to be a conspiracy with the Italians, especially in the case of Eritrea. Martin Plaut (2019), an academic of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, also lists other negative reasons for the opposition against Selassie, considering him co-responsible for the 1973-74 famine and the suppression of Eritrean freedom leading to its separation from Ethiopia.⁸

Other critics have referred in a diminishing way to Selassie’s ‘messianic’ role with the Rastafari, while laughing at his ‘divinity’. Plaut nevertheless stresses that war, murder, instability, and stagnation under the leftist regimes after Selassie’s death placed the emperor again in a more positive light and assessed him as a “*champion of African freedom against colonial intervention*”. Yet another author, Yilma Bekele, calls the Anoole Statue and its Museum a shameful act of the leaders of OPDO (Oromo People’s Democratic Organization), thereby provoking continuing commentaries and discussions. Those who cherish the erection of Haile Sellasie’s statue and the values it represents, without doubt reflect the words, written by one of the great modern Ethiopologists, Edward Ullendorf (1960:206):

“It will always be the Emperor Haile Sellasie’s greatest glory that he has been able to bring these two worlds [i.e. traditional and modern] in

⁸ Plaut considers the emperor’s case as “*an example of how leaders have gone in and out of fashion*”, comparing this case with these of “*fallen idols*” such as Cecil Rhodes, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, self-proclaimed emperor Bokassa of Central Africa and Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo, all of them being labelled dictators or tyrants (Plaut, 2019).



harmony: gently to restrain the impatient and quietly to urge on the tardy, to preserve and also to discard without loss of Ethiopia's ancient and historic identity".

The inauguration ceremony of Haile Selassie's statue, which was carved by sculptors of the Ale Felege Art School of the Addis Ababa University, was honoured with the presence of many African leaders and officials (*BBC News*, 2019; Plaut, 2019). The Oromos, the Somalis, the Afars and the people from Harar, however, remain vocal against the erection of the statue. On 12 February 2019, the daily *Tigrai Online* (2019) wrote that it was the result of a desperate action by the new prime minister, Ably Ahmed⁹, a Muslim who now also follows the policy to reunite the peoples of his country, and that "*in the eyes of the Oromo people in particular and southern Ethiopians in general Menelik II and his cousin Haile Selassie I are responsible for countless abuses in their dignity, language, culture and history.*"¹⁰

It is somehow encouraging that some Ethiopian intellectual authors, notwithstanding their criticism of one of the two monuments, refer to the possible value of these statues for future education: Yohannes Woldemariam (2019), rejecting the statue of Haile Selassie, wishes that pupils would learn the (negative) 'truth' (sic) about the emperor in the schoolbooks, while Yilma Bekele (2014) in support of Haile Selassie notes (and thereby rejects) the judgement of Ato Mohamed Jilo, Head of the 'Oromia region Culture and Tourism Bureau', on the Anoole Memorial, stating that the monument is necessary for commemorating the massive killing of the Oromo so that such killing of this group does not take place again, and should be used for teaching the future generations of the Ethiopians.

Some final remarks

The Arsi Anoole monument as well as the Haile Selassie statue both refer to the Ethiopian past, remembering heroic deeds and circumstances of sections and tribes of the Ethiopic people, thereby glorifying, or vilifying the 'Solomonic' emperors of the country. The Anoole memorial celebrates the courage and the suffering of the Arsi Oromo people as well as its final 'victory' of being recognised as equals in modern Ethiopia. It is thereby remarkable that both monuments discussed in this paper have continued art expressions that may be called 'traditional', the magnifying and glorifying statues of Christian Ethiopian Kings and Emperors in mostly Amharic and Tigre country on the one side, and the traditional, especially Muslim, Arsi Oromo Tomb Art on the other side.

The reactions in favour of, or against the monuments are the result of a not yet completed mature assessment of the earlier national events leading to the modernisation of Ethiopia. National pride for the old and magnificent Christian traditional, mostly 'Solomonic' culture, expressed in its art and literature, has been put into question precisely by the great difficulties of the more recent governments' planning of co-existence of ethnic, linguistic and especially religious antagonising groups. The tension between the threatened Christian Orthodox and the more and more self-imposing Muslims (Demichelis, 2016) continues the mediaeval stress and wars between the two groups, which – today – continue to feel themselves threatened in their existence and traditions by the other faction in practically all facets of their existence.

Finally, we believe that it is improbable that in the near future the political and cultural statues of Africa will be seen and respected as interesting, necessary and educational tools for teaching the lessons of African history and preserving its cultural and historical memory. This restriction will have a negative effect for the use and publication of scholarly research and schoolbooks. It will also have a negative effect upon the status of the traditional Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Christian survival in Ethiopia as a whole.

⁹ Ably Ahmed won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019.

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of this theme, see Odomaro Mubamgizi (2020).



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Addenda: A note on the use of Ethiopian Amharic names

The transcription of Ethiopian names written in the Ge'ez – Amharic script, is always a problem for scholars. There are no fixed, generally accepted and used rules, with almost every author presenting his own note on transcription. As for the names of Ethiopian scholars writing in Amharic, the problem is more acute, because we read different versions in different publications. Ethiopians have more than one name. Some Western scholars consider the last, others the first mentioned name as the surname. Both are wrong. Lately many scholars opt for the first name. Mesfin Tadesse (2010) notes that Ethiopians “receive usually one name ...at birth”. This name is followed by the biological father’s name. Seldom there is a third name. There is in fact no surname. Tadesse advises the Ethiopian authors to use their names as “close to the original as possible” and advises Western editors “not to look for a ‘family’ or ‘surname’, as there are none”.

Consequently, the recent ‘fashion’ among many English-speaking scholars to use the first name as surname, is wrong. In view of the above, I mention - whenever possible - Ethiopian writers and scholars with their full (normally two) names in the order they themselves give them. As for terminology (e.g. titles and places), it appears that each Western author makes his own rules and indicates these in his/her publication.