

## Yeweinshet Beshah-Woured

**Citation:** *Beshah-Woured, Yeweinshet, 2010, Testimony. Interview conducted by Roman Herzog April 18<sup>th</sup> 2010, <http://www.campifascisti.it/file/media/Testimony%20Yeweinshet%20Beshah-Woured.pdf>*

Name: Yeweinshet

Surname: Beshah-Woured

Place and date of birth: Addis Abeba, 1931

Nationality: Ethiopian

Gender: f

Recording quality: (48 kHz., Stereo)

Date of imprisonment: after Yekatit 12, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1937

Camps of imprisonment:

**Dejazmach Latibalu Residence**, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia: 20 February 1937

**Asmara**, Eritrea: end of February/beginning of March 1937

**Massawa**, Eritrea: end of February/beginning of March 1937

**Asinara (SS)**, Italy: March 1937 - 1938

**Clinica italiana delle malattie tropicali**, Rome (RM), Italy 1938 - 1938

**Tivoli (RM)**, Italia fine 1938 - 1939

**Addis Abeba**, Ethiopia 1939 – April 5<sup>th</sup> 1941

Mayor topics and particularities of the interview (Summary)

Yeweinshet Beshah-Woured was six years old when she has been deported to Italy together with her mother and a brother, after her father had been shot by the Italians. She is part of the almost 400 members of the old Ethiopian aristocracy, which after the attempted bombing of Graziani on February 19<sup>th</sup> 1937 has been deported to Italy. She remembers the episode from the eyes of a child and also in the reflection of her life after deportation, separating both levels of memory clearly. From the interview emerges that conditions of deportation and imprisonment have been quite roughly and hard for the majority of the Ethiopians, whereas few members of the high elite (Rases and their families), among them for luck Yeweinshets family, even if considered enemies by the Italian authorities, were confined but lived in comfortable conditions.

The interview covers in the second part besides the deportation and imprisonment theme also the topic of why in Ethiopia there has been so little remembrance culture about Italian occupation, pointing out that on one hand for diplomatic consideration no part wanted really to move ahead with a war crimes trial, and on the other hand in Ethiopian culture the event is not remembered as Ethiopia being a colony for six years, but as if Ethiopia has “only” been occupied and never been a colony.

Date, place and duration of the interview: April 18th 2010, Addis Abeba, First part 56'45”, second part 80'49”

Language used: English

Name of the researcher and copyright holder: Roman Herzog

Facilitator: Ian Campbell

Fundamental elements of the meeting:

Interview in the private house of the Beshah-Woured family in Addis Abeba with a lot of time and very relaxed, very open and frank. Unfortunately the planned interview with the mother could not be realized, because she fell sick.

## First Part

**Ricercatore 99?** (*Age of the mother Sara Gebruyesus Beshah-Woured Habtewold, \* 1910, August*)

**Yeweinshet Beshah-Woured** In August. As far as we can tell. Because, although her parents were what we would say educated people, for those times, a lot of information and documents have vanished. And we have heard the same dates over and over again. So.... and how much? There were ten of them. My mother is number five in a family of ten. From her sisters and so on. They say she was born in 1903 Ethiopian calendar. We are in 2002, born in August, which will make her 99 in August.

**R** *We try to get as much testimonials of people deported to Italian fascist camps as possible. So, I'm just interested, because there is so little known about the camps in Ethiopia, and about Ethiopians deported to Italy. I'm very, very happy to meet you, because as you said, there are very few people, and I'm just interested in as much details, that you can remember. So maybe you just begin to tell me the story, as you like, maybe a little bit beginning from before. Because you were child when you were deported, so you had how many years?*

**YBW** I must have been five when they occupied. So we were deported about a year later I think. Because, I don't remember the exact deportation date, but our starting point is February I think in the European calendar maybe 1937 probably. You will have to check those. I'll give you the best I can. So I must have been six then. And, so I have recollections, I have very vivid recollections, and it's of details. And sometimes they may not even go together. So I don't know how you want me to deal with that?

**R** *It's no problem, if the details don't go together, because, just may you begin...*

**YBW** So whatever I remember?

**R** *Yeah, and maybe we begin a bit chronologically. Maybe you can say, how was life before occupation. To get a little bit known to your family and the context.*

**YBW** Yes, I have a little recollection. My father was an official in the government. He was an official in the government and he was close to the Emperor because he grew up together as his servant. And that makes him very close. Servants there are degrees and so he was educated. He was educated here, went to school, when the Emperor went to school, whether they sat together or separately I don't know, but I know he was educated.

**R** *What was his name?*

**YBW** Beshah-Woured. And he may have carried the books to school, whatever I don't know. And then he was sent abroad to study. He was sent first to India, to the two of the Emperor's relatives. And from India it was not possible for them to carry on then. Or maybe they went to learn the language English, because they started French here. So this is a bit speculation I don't know. And then he was sent to the United States. And he was in the States up to just before the coronation. He came back, and went back to the service of the Emperor. And he had not a top position, but an official position in the ministry of finance. And all this is by the way, what I learned later I didn't know all those then. So we had a comfortable life, we lived near the palace and we had all the comfort. But not that he did not live in the traditional way. He would. Yes he went back and force on mule back. He didn't have a car. Some people did, but he didn't have a retinue. Because many officials did, they would have a large retinue following them. And so on. So he had a more, you know, simpler life. And we had, you know, I remember we had electricity, for example. Which I understand came from the palace, because it was not generally available. So you know, we had a comfortable (life), unless, you know, we didn't have a big house, or anything like that.

**R** *How many have you been in family?*

**YBW** Actually me and my brother, another brother was born in Italy, during...

**R** *During the deportation?*

**YBW** Yes. And so that is the family. And what I remember again - I don't know if this is what you want, you can stop me - I remember talk of the war. And everybody getting ready for war. And food being prepared for the troops. In the household, when there is somebody in the household going to war, we have traditional foods that are, you know, dehydrated, and things like that. All this was being prepared. And there was talk of my father having to go to war.

**R** *That was before the Italian attack?*

**YBW** Yes, I thought you wanted me to go back?

**R** *It's perfect. But so you expected the Italian attack?*

**YBW** I suppose so. Yes, I think so. I mean, even in the historical context there were incidents leading up to it. So I suppose, that part I don't remember, but I remember talk of war. And that the Italians are going to... I remember this very clearly. It's not idle talk. Because I remember they took me to see a play, and there was a devil in the play. And I always thought the Italians were people with horns (*laughing*) and that tail. (*laughing*) *That is very vivid.* (*laughing*) You asked for it. Then suddenly I remember that talk that my father was not going to war. So all the prepared food, that was prepared, had... was taken ceremonially to the Palace, to, you know, to contribute to the main whatever food store I suppose. This is... I can see it, you know! (*Laughing*) So my father did not go to war. And I understand from what I heard later as an adult, that he was assigned looking after the family, the wife and children of the Emperor. So that is the reason why he did not go. So practically everybody else went to war. And then what I remember after that is the Italians are coming. And we were taken to what I'm told, was the British legation, for safety. How my family ended up there, I have no idea. But we were in a camp there. We were in tents. Red Cross, I can remember that.

**R** *That was immediately after the Italian attack?*

**YBW** The attack as such I don't remember. In fact there was something... What happened was, they took my mother and us, the family, out of Addis, to a place Lege Dadī, near Mary. Lege Dadī is outside of Addis<sup>1</sup>, and it's just little villages. And if there is a bomb attack, they assumed, it will not be. And I remember writing a letter to my father, because I didn't like the hut we were living in. And that was my first letter. So, I remember it. And from that after that, my father right after the war was over, in a very short time, and my father went to, took the family on by train to Djibouti. And I think the Emperor joined them, when he came back from the war. They say, it was in Akaki. I have no idea. This is a historical incident, that you will find somewhere else. But I have heard Akaki. But all this I only heard later, I did not know about this. This was not significant in my book<sup>2</sup>. What I remember clearly is that we were taken to the British legation, as the Italians were driving into town. I remember seeing all the trucks, passing the legation. I was looking for the horns and the tails, and they weren't there. (*laughing*)

**R** *And you didn't find them?*

**YBW** I can't forget this. (*laughing*). And there was my uncle, telling me, you know coaching me to say, how good the Italians were and so on, never to say bad things about the Italians. Like they have horns and they're devils, you see. All this I remember. And I remember seeing my first dead body. In the legation. And that was, although it was a gruesome sight, when I talk about it, it has never affected me with nightmares or anything, because he had the throat cut. And lying there and my uncle went to. You know I suppose there was a commotion, he wanted to look at it, and he told us to sit quiet. But I didn't. I followed him. And between his legs I poked, I peeped, and saw this body. So it must have been quite gruesome. There was... They say, there was looting in Addis Abeba just before the Italians came and many houses were burnt, and there was many people, sort of people also killed each other, but this is the part I heard second hand, it's not really part of my recollection. So after that, I suppose everything

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<sup>1</sup> Situated some 15 kilometres northeast from the centre of the town, today alongside national road 1.

<sup>2</sup> She refers to her life.

calmed down, and we were not in our home, because the Italians took it over and they gave us another smaller house, just below Entoto. Do you know Entoto, the church. Near the school if you have been down there. And then my father went with the Emperor, he went abroad with the Emperor. And I understand he had gone as far as wherever the Emperor went. And he went to England also, but insisted on returning to his family. So he came back. This is also hearsay; I don't remember any of this being discussed.

**R** *It's ok if you mix it, that's no problem.*

**YBW** It doesn't mater, ok: Anyway, so the day, they were arrested, my mother and father, although my father was not arrested in the house, he had gone to the palace. Because they were summing for I imagine this occasion Graziani, the day Graziani was attacked<sup>3</sup>. They came for my mother. And took her away. They in fact were not that kind to her. Because I saw them beating her up. Not terribly roughly maybe, but a few blows I remember clearly. There were two other people in our house, one was my teacher, that, you know, I was being taught to read and write. And then they beat them up too, the two men.

**R** *And you?*

**YBW** No

**R** *They didn't touch you?*

**YBW** No, no. And then we were allowed, I was allowed to take my doll. And my brother also had some thing with him, I don't know what. And then we walked down the hill, passed the Palace. And... you have seen the monument<sup>4</sup>? Ok passed the monument, not to far from there, there is a house that I still recognize that they had commissioned to as a temporary place to keep prisoners. And then I saw a lot of blood and gore. Because people were shot. There was a man, you know, his heart beating through his shirt and that sort of things. And we were in that place.

**R** *This was a kind of prison, this house, a kind of first prison we can say?*

**YBW** Yes. A collection point. That's what I understand now. Because there were a lot of people and more were coming, and there were plenty of soldiers. And I remember being thirsty. When we were thirsty the Italians brought us a pail of water. And I don't know why we bent down to drink like horses, why couldn't we have used our hands, me and my brother, I don't know. Because we were not used to.

**R** *Because you were tied?*

**YBW** No, no, no, I didn't see anybody like that. I don't remember seeing anybody like that. People were free, like this, I think they were just terrorized.

**R** *But how many Italians were there?*

**YBW** I don't know.

**R** *But as much to make sure that nobody tried to or could escape?*

**YBW** I suppose so. But I mean people with guns, soldiers are with guns, and the others are terrorized, where do they go? They shot immediately. And people were dying anywhere, I suppose so, it didn't matter. But I suppose somebody who wanted to die, would do it. But I don't know about that. Anyway.

**R** *How was this house called?*

**YBW** It is the residence of the Dejazmach<sup>5</sup> Latibalu somebody I know, who had served the Emperor with my father.

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<sup>3</sup> Yekatit 12, February 19th 1937

<sup>4</sup> Yekatit 12 monument

<sup>5</sup> "Commander or General of the Gate, a military title meaning commander of the central body of a traditional Ethiopian armed force composed of a vanguard, main body, left and right wings and a rear body.

**R** *And it is near the Emperor's palace?*

**YBW** No, it is a little below. Do you know the hospital? By the square there is a hospital. This martyrs' square<sup>6</sup>, up in Sidist Kilo. There is a hospital, that's a hospital<sup>7</sup>. That was the hospital, I think one of two in town at that time. And then you go a little below that, you wouldn't know that place if I told you now, but... what do we have there? Have you seen any school, Nazareth School? Things like that. Instead of going on the main road, you take a (road) behind the ministry of, what is ministry of Justice now. Justice I think, I'm so confused, I don't know about that<sup>8</sup>.

Anyway, it is not too far from the palace<sup>9</sup>. But we walked all that way. And my grandmother lived on that road. And they went out my aunts, and they saw us, followed us, they came with us to this... We were on the veranda of this house, which is a (*incomprehensible*) right now. We were on the veranda of this house and the Italians I think told... They asked permission to take us away, or the Italians told them to take us away. So we children went with to my mother's house, eh grandmother's house. And my mother remained. And they took her to the palace, where they detained a lot of people. And she remained there for a few days.

So I've heard it said, that my father was shot a few days after that. But that's... And, I think, they told... my mother said, that the Italians told her. «They said we've killed your husband». They told her, before she left for Italy, that he was shot. She was in the palace. Anyway, in between, what I remember is, I think it was the same day, as this Graziani incident<sup>10</sup>, the whole town was burning and I remember a lot of fire. And we were taken by friends of the family from the house to another spot, somewhere else where they thought, we were safe. And we were sleeping on the veranda like this and looking beyond, there was a lot of fire. I remember this.

**R** *Why, was there so much fire?*

**YBW** The town was, they were burning a lot of houses, I think, perhaps the Italians were burning, people were looting and the Italians burned a lot of houses, I think. There were shooting, killing and burning. So I don't remember any conversation, we were just scared, and our aunts were just trying to keep us quiet. We were not discussing the incident, I don't think (*laughing*) I just remember. I can see the fire almost right now. And then when everything was calm again a few days later, they came for us early morning and they said, «Now we... you are coming, to bring your mother home. Come with us, and you'll bring her back home!». Then when we were... I didn't know where my mother was. I just knew, that she was not with us. And when they took us from my grandmother's place, we went on a place I could not identify. I don't remember how far it was. But when we got there, there was an aeroplane. So they put us on. And my mother was waiting for us.

**R** *Only you children or also your grandmother?*

**YBW** No, no no, just me and my brother. And when we joined my mother, and when we were put in this plane, I remember one other lady, who is a friend of my mothers' and they were together during that time. Maybe there were more, but I don't remember. From my recollection it is not a big plane, it was a small one and there was a big hole. You could see through right. (*laughing*) Yes.

**R** *In the plane?*

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<sup>6</sup> Called Yekatit 12

<sup>7</sup> Yekatit Hospital

<sup>8</sup> In fact it isn't the Ministry of Justice, but the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

<sup>9</sup> The old palace, Genete Le'ul, of the Emperor Haile Selassie is today the Institute of Ethiopia Studies of the Addis Ababa University (Sidist Kilo Campus, Yekatit 12 Square, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) The distance from the Ex-Palace to the place which YBW indicates as camp Dejazmach Latibalu is approximately 600 metres.

<sup>10</sup> The unsuccessful attempt to kill Rodolfo Graziani on 19 February 1937 (Campbell, Ian, 2011, The Plot to Kill Graziani, Addis Abeba: Addis Ababa University Press, Rochat, Giorgio, 1975, L'attentato a Graziani e la repressione italiana in Etiopia nel 1936-37, In: *Italia contemporanea* No 118; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodolfo\\_Graziani](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodolfo_Graziani)).

**YBW** Yes, that's what I saw.

**R** *So it was a military plane.*

**YBW** It's a military plane.

**R** *For parachutists or....*

**YBW** Maybe, maybe it is not a big plane and there weren't many soldiers. I think there were two people, maybe the flyer and somebody else. And where did they take us? I don't know. Maybe Asmara. Couldn't be much further from there. Yes, I think it must have been Asmara, because from there we were taken by truck to embark onto the boat that was waiting to take us to Italy. I remember the incidents, but I don't know where, why we were being taken. OK? But I imagine it must have been Asmara and then by truck. I remember being hungry and things like that. Certain incidents.

**R** *Did they give you anything to eat or to drink?*

**YBW** No, we were hungry. And there weren't many children. I don't remember anybody else. We were very hungry and there was a lady, who people said she had some bread. And she is a prominent lady by the way, whom I learned to know later. And somebody asked her for the bread. She said no. She was keeping it for her husband. Maybe he was a sick man, I don't know. And then somebody else heard it in the camp and brought some bread, a prisoner.

**R** *Which camp?*

**YBW** Well I suppose it's a camp, I didn't see a camp, but there were a lot of people<sup>11</sup>.

**R** *Before going on the boat?*

**YBW** Yes. And this man is, who was later, who died as the Dejazmach Girmachew. You don't know any dignitaries in the Ethiopian? Anyway, somebody I know quite well. And he was a minister in Haile Selasse's Government and so on. Anyway, that I remember, we were hungry and I don't remember food being rationed at all. But this man fed us with whatever he had. And then we went on board ship. And the next thing I remember, my mother and this lady they shared a cabin, and I remember them throwing food out of the window.

**R** *So you had cabins on board?*

**YBW** I suppose so. I don't remember if there were more people in that cabin or maybe I learned the word cabin later and I just stuck it there. I don't know. (*laughing*) I really don't know.

**R** *But from hearing later maybe you now, how many people were on this boat?*

**YBW** No. But a lot of people. I know there were... the boat was full of people. And we were taken to Asinara<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Massawa Transit camp

<sup>12</sup> The total number of Ethiopians deported to Italy after the failed attack on Graziani is 377 by the end of 1937, according to records in Italian archives, one fourth of them women and children. They have been deported in various ship transfers like 197 persons on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1937 with the steamer "Toscana", which arrived at Asinara on March 17<sup>th</sup>. Another group of 87 individuals has been deported on the steamer "Sardegna" which departed in Massawa at the beginning of April 1937. Dangerous considered individuals have been interned in **Longobucco**, near Cosenza, where in August 1937 28 men have been recorded, number which increased to 35 by January 1939. The famous military leader of the Ethiopian resistance Ras Imrru and two of his men have been imprisoned at the island **Ponza** (LT) from August 1937 to January 1939. Most of the Ethiopian men, women and children were sent to the prison island **Asinara** in Sardinia, where by May 1937 the largest group of 284 people has been interned, 214 men, 43 women and 27 children, number which decreased to 94 by January 1939. Some of these internees were sent to other places in the months following May 1937. Not dangerous considered women and children were sent to **Mercogliano** (AV), where by August 1937 32 women and 21 children have been recorded, number which increased to 32 men, 37 women and 22 children by the end of 1937. Five *Rases* considered "collaborative" and their staff were confined at **Tivoli**, a total of 11 men in August 1937, number which rose to 18 men, 6 women and 4 children by January 1939, three of them YBW and her two brothers, after their stay in the **Clinica italiana delle malattie tropicali**, where by August 1937 9 women have been recorded. At the **Villa Camilluccia** in Rome, 20 men, 10 women and 4 children were imprisoned by 1937. Four male students were sent by August 1937 to **Palermo** and stayed there all 1937. 15 men were sent to **Torre Del Greco** near Naples in August 1937, whereas 12 children have been interned at **Naples** at the same period. Finally the Emperor's daughter Woizero

R *Where is it?*

YBW Oh! Asinara is a prison island. Near where you live, Sicily (*laughing*) Yes. I think. Asinara. It must be near Sicily. It's a prison Island, it's a prison colony. So, Italian prisoners were on that Island. It was not inhabited by anybody else. That much I remember because I used to see uniformed men working on the island. I suppose it was hard labour and things like that. I don't remember any unkindness or any thing like that. But I remember, what I remember is, there is a small sort of grocery shop, where we collected our rations, it's not a grocery shop, I don't know what you'd call it, I was old enough to be send on an errand to bring food, milk and things like that from that shop. So I suppose we were fed well, I don't know.

R *But you had to buy it?*

YBW No, we had nothing. I don't know where we got cloths from. Because we were clothed.

R *You didn't take anything with you on this boat?*

YBW No, I don't think so! My mother didn't take anything from the house! I remember taking a doll, that's all. So this I cannot help you with. I don't know whether did Italians clothe us, I don't know. And then there were a lot of people, a lot of Ethiopians, I mean, you know, it was just like a small Ethiopian village. And we had to go to the place and collect food and so on. On the way, I had to pass through work men, who were maybe doing a lot of work on the road or whatever, I don't know. And there were snakes. And I used to get really frightened. And these prisoners used to help me, maybe killed the snake, or helped me cross the road, or whatever. They were kind; they were not rough or anything like that.

R *These prisoners were military or civil people, or other?*

YBW I understood later this to be civil prisoners. Which has been closed now, it is no longer a prison But the island is supposed to be a prison colony<sup>13</sup>. That's where they send their civil prisoners maybe the worst or whatever, I don't know. And then, you see, of the people that I remember, who were with us, mostly I remember the women. And there was this lady I told you about, who has since died, Woizero Sanabedjus, distantly related to my father. Then there was the Emperor's daughter. Yes. Woizero Romanework<sup>14</sup> and her children. I think she had been caught. Her husband was one of the big fighters and died in the war<sup>15</sup>. And maybe she was somewhere near her husband and she was arrested by the Italians and they took her. And I think she had more problems than we did. With her more children. With hindsight I believe they took her of the island, because of that. And they took her away from us.

R *Do you know where to?*

YBW Yes. Because we joined her.

R *So we'll come to that point. One question about the boat from Asmara, how long did it take, more or less, it was a long journey, I guess, a week or something?*

YBW No Asmara is inland.

R *Ah from Massawa. It must have been one week or more?*

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Romanework and her children have been imprisoned at the **Missione della Consolata** at Turin, a total of 11 women and children in 1937 (Sbacchi, Alberto, 1977, Italy and the treatment of the Ethiopian Aristocracy 1937-1940, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol 10, No. 2 (1977) p. 210-213; Guarasci, Roberto, 1984, *Una colonia di confino per etiopici: Longobucco (1937-1943)*, In: Università degli studi della Calabria, dipartimento di storia (a cura di), *Miscellanea di studi Storici* No 4, p. 183-195)

<sup>13</sup> Prisoners and warders were the only inhabitants of Asinara for about 110 years, until the closure of the prison in December 1997 (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asinara>).

<sup>14</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanework\\_Haile\\_Selassie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanework_Haile_Selassie)

<sup>15</sup> Dejazmach Beyene Merid ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beyene\\_Merid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beyene_Merid)).

**YBW** I suppose so, I mean, I'm sure you can easily find that information. During those times and today, I mean comparatively, it must have been a military boat whatever it was. I have no idea, but we were on the boat for a few days. That I know, we sort of lived in the boat. I don't remember running around deck, there was nothing like that. I think we were confined. We must have been. I don't remember.

**R** *And on Asinara you lived in houses?*

**YBW** Yes.

**R** *And how was living there?*

**YBW** Well all I remember is that we slept on beds, maybe with my mother. I don't remember. There was another lady with my mother a prominent lady, who died recently, Woizero Seledo. She was left behind. But my mother was expecting a baby. So this is why, a day they took her off the island. And we went to Rome. That's where we met the lady, Woizero Romanework, the Emperor's daughter and her children. And there was another lady with my mother, who I think was also pregnant. Woizero Touawitch, she died there.

**R** *On the island anybody died?*

**YBW** I don't know. There were so many people, it's quite possible. I don't know. But I think there is a list of all the prisoners in the Italian archives. So I'm sure you'll find some information there. But Asinara I'm surprised you haven't heard of it.

**R** *I heard of it but I don't think that it is near Sicily.*

**YBW** It maybe Corsica, isn't that too far?

**R** *It's another island near Sardinia.*

**YBW** Sardinia maybe. My geography around there is not very good. Anyway. And then we went to, we were not in a prison, but in a hospital. *Clinica Tropicale Italiana*<sup>16</sup>. You know Rome, you know Città Universitaria, right there. In this, because we came from the tropics. I suppose. They put one and two together, so all the kids being born also (*laughing*) needed some tropical atmosphere. (*laughing*) And this lady she died before? I don't remember whether it was before. I remember her being taken away. But I don't think she was dead, when they took her away. I think whenever the people like my mother, needed medical attention, they had to be taken to a special faculty, because, this is just for tropical. We were in the basement of the hospital. Upstairs, there were the Libyans. Libyan prisoners maybe, I have no idea. I was just talking to my mother, right after I left you here, and I said, who were the Libyans, and she said, she didn't know about them. And I said, «But there was a painter also, who painted the Emperor's daughter. And he called it, la Madonna nera. And I said, «Who was he, was he a prisoner? Was he Italian?» Just a few minutes ago. She said, she thought, he was a refugee, not Italian. A refugee from where I have no idea. But I remember this picture, it was a very... This lady, had a very dark complexion and she was very beautiful, at least in my eyes. And he had painted her and I remember the picture.

**R** *And he painted her there in the prison?*

**YBW** It's not a prison, it's a hospital.

**R** *But you were not allowed to go out?*

**YBW** I suppose he was able to move around. That's probably why she says, «no, he was not a prisoner, he was a refugee.»

**R** *OK, but I mean, as Ethiopian people have been deported to Italy, even Libyan people have been deported to Italy. And even the Libyan Jews have all been deported to Italian camps.*

**YBW** I see.

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<sup>16</sup> Official name: Clinica italiana delle malattie tropicali

**R** *I don't know about Ethiopian Jews, I heard that also them were deported, but there is no information on it.*

**YBW** I doubt it, because they were mostly peasantry, there were very few educated Jews. Anyway, we moved around as children. Everybody was happy to take us out. There was a nunnery nearby. And they used to take us, whenever they went, there out and did go. Yes and they will take us to places wherever, you know.

**R** *In Rome?*

**YBW** Yes. They used to take us out. Well our pastime was a very interesting one. (*laughing*) You see, the *Clinical Tropical* is about here, ok, this is (it), and then here right this, our building, this is the mortuary and pathology is upstairs. OK? Now I know it's pathology, I didn't then. But I knew there (about) a lot of dead bodies. So my brother and I, our pastime was to go there every morning to see how many dead bodies were being brought. (*laughing*) Nobody stopped us. And certainly we would go in, there is a corridor, cubicles on right and left, where they would dress up the dead body and prepare it for burial. And the family would come into little cubicles. But if you go right through, there is a big hall, where the bodies are laid out coming from all the hospitals. And we just go in and talked with everybody and nobody says, «go away».

**R** *So the dead were Italians...*

**YIBW** Yes, I suppose so.

**R** *...or Ethiopians also?*

**YIBW** No, no. I have never seen any Ethiopian. And I don't remember trying to find out. Because you know, it was normal, not to see Ethiopians. There weren't many Ethiopians. The Ethiopians were: One Aphanigus, Aphanigus is actually from Menelik's time<sup>17</sup>, a big dignitary of Menelik with his manservant. The Emperor's daughter, whom they later took away to Turin. That's where she died. And then there was Woizero Touawitch, who died, that's it. And my mother in that corridor, that's all.

**R** *And you and your brother of course.*

**YBW** So we were not expecting any black people. And every day we just go there and we were always interested in the little children, and said, they dressed them up like angels, you know. All white and beautiful, and the families would come and that bewailing we'll just be looking curiously and that's it. We had nowhere else to go. We didn't go to *kindergarten*, school or playground or anything like that. So that's where we were, spending the day, our days. And sometimes, as I said, the ladies from the nunnery would come and will be kind to my mother.

**R** *But you said, we, so you and?*

**YBW** My brother.

**R** *But your brother was born in the hospital!*

**YBW** No, one was with me. There were two of us from here. And then my ... The day they took my mother to the maternity ward, we were really upset, we were left behind. And then they took us. In fact before she delivered, I think, they took us to see her in the maternity. And she came back with the baby, but she was ill for many, many months. I don't know how long, but it was a long time. She... I don't know the before and after, but she was sick all the time. And she has all the scars here. Which I think probably is skin TB, with hindsight. I just don't know what they thought of it then or what they did for her. And she, maybe you noticed, she has these freckles. And I think they were interested in her freckles and they were photographing her and they were using ultraviolet rays and these and that. I think they were trying to find out, what it was all about. By the way that is in the family. I'm ok but there is my cousin, which has many more of those. Most of my relatives have it. It comes in the family. But she has had it for many years. And they were interested in that.

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<sup>17</sup> Emperor Menelik II governor of Ethiopia from 1889 to 1913 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menelek\\_II\\_of\\_Ethiopia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menelek_II_of_Ethiopia)).

**R** *So they made also a kind of medical experiments?*

**YBW** I suppose so. Although I have never heard her speak of it.

**R** *But I mean we had the racist laws and the racist culture.*

**YBW** Yes.

**R** *So there should be a racist treatment also like in Germany for example, when they tried to define the various so called races, maybe they examined that?*

**YBW** I really don't know. You see, she did say, they were kind to her. Yes generally speaking. Although she forgot that she was beaten. But Italians are very kind to children. There is one thing I missed, I'll get back to it, but I just want, excuse me... *(She searches photos but doesn't find them.)*  
[pause]

**YBW** To go back. During the Italian occupation, we were living somewhere in the northern part of Addis Abeba. We had a big compound, not a big house. It belonged to one of Menelik's dignitaries. I suppose it was rented. And his relatives, servants and so on living in that quarter also ... *(the home help brings some photos, but not the photos YBW looked for).* [pause]

Sorry about that. And it was a very big, the biggest compound. But we were in the woods with, you know, lots of trees. A nice place actually. And then just before the end of the occupation the Italian government brought a big bunch of soldiers to live there. They lived in their trucks. And I think they must have come from all over to reinforce the troops of whatever, we don't know. They lived there. For how long, I don't remember, but I became very friendly with them and as I said, they were very friendly. They are very friendly with children. You know, I'm amazed that nowadays you hear of children being abused, and this and that. I suppose that was as good an opportunity as any for anybody to abuse. But they were very kind, really. They are always kind to children. And they stayed there until, in fact, almost right till the end of the occupation. They left just before the British came. And I can't imagine them going very far. Because whichever way they went, you know... The only thing I remember and I'm sorry for is, that they, as they were coming... I think they came from Asmara, and as they were coming, they collected a lot of young people. Whom they just kept with them, they were kind to, they fed them, and these kids, I think, probably came willingly, or maybe even their parents might have said, take them away. But they just left them. And there were lot's of stray kids right after the occupation. Yes, I remember. Anyway, that was the part I had forgotten to mention.

**R** *So coming back to the hospital: your mother was sick, you children walking your ways around, what about your brother, the newborn?*

**YBW** The newborn, he was a sickly child. He was not very healthy.

**R** *But he was cured and cared, the service in the hospital was a normal service, like for anybody else, or were you treated specially bad?*

**YBW** I don't think so, I don't think we were (treated) especially bad. There might have been some neglect. I don't know. Some people don't like people who look different. But I never heard, so I don't know. Anyway, there was one lady, called Signorina Redovini, who was, she was yes, not very kind to my mother, I think... NO! Signorina Redovini was very kind to my mother. She was, actually I think had served in the hospital, had served in the hospital and now being sick herself. And so she lived more or less like the others and she was always very kind. That is Sorella Uge. Sorella Uge, I don't know, were the name comes from. She was a woman of authority, she was unkind. So my mother was a little bit fearful of this woman. But Redovini always stood up for my mother.

**R** *And you children were with your mother in one room...*

**YBW** Yes.

**R** *...or all Ethiopians in one room?*

**YBW** No, no ,no. All the Ethiopians had a room for themselves. Maybe the Emperor's daughter had two rooms. I don't know. But you see, there were too many of them. She had 5 children. Maybe something like that. So maybe they had more room, I don't know.

**R** *And you Ethiopians got together also to talk and discuss, or did you have no contact?*

**YBW** No, I mean you are free to move around in that place. But they never went out. But my mother just said, that the... sometimes, she was taken out by the nuns. But not very, not in an open way. She may or not be right, I don't know.

**R** *Which means, that she asked and paid them or in a not open way, what does that mean?*

**YBW** She was not allowed to go out. But I know the nuns were kind to her. She was not allowed to go out. I remember one day, when somebody arranged for her to go to the Opera or something like that, and I screamed, because I wanted to go. You know how children are. And I think she hit me. I don't know, but I remember some incident. Because they were trying not to attract attention and I was being nasty. *(laughing)*

**R** *Do you remember the food?*

**YBW** Not in particular, no. Good, bad, indifferent? No, I don't remember.

**R** *And you yourself stayed all the time healthy or did you also fall sick?*

**YBW** Maybe childhood ... yes I remember we had something, one of these childhood diseases or something I think, they took care of at those times. Nothing dramatic. My youngest, the one who was born there, was always sick, I think he was probably not well fed. You know nutritionally not getting the right food. He had hernia. *(the home help brings coffee)* You know he was always not well. And he looked sick, even in my eyes. He was pale, maybe didn't have enough sun. And my mother was always worried. Even after we came back here, he was always demanding attention.

**R** *Did you have any information from outside, about war going on or occupation going on in Ethiopia?*

**YBW** Not me. *(laughing)* I don't know if my mother did. She wouldn't have any information, because nobody was coming to visit her. And I don't think she was being interrogated or anything like that. I don't think so.

**R** *But there was military presence in the hospital?*

**YBW** No.

**R** *Nothing?*

**YBW** No. Where would we go? To Asmara? *(Laughing)* Where would we go? I don't think we had any chance. This old man, from Menelik's time, I think he was an invalid, he couldn't, he was maybe paraplegic or something like that, because I have never seen him standing up. He had somebody to look after him, one of his own servants. So as poor man, (he) had to look after him too as a prisoner, *(laughing)*. The lady, the Emperor's daughter was taken to Turin and she died there. Maybe another child, another son of hers died there. The two other sons came back after war. [pause] Food I don't remember. Did we eat? *(laughing)* I don't remember. I think we had hospital food. It must have been, they couldn't give us anything else. That's what we had.

**R** *So how did this hospital then end?*

**YBW** Unfortunately you don't know the people involved, but Ras Seyoum<sup>18</sup>, one of the very high dignitaries in Ethiopian terms, he was also, not quite a prisoner, maybe a guest of the Italian government.

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<sup>18</sup> Seyoum Mangasha (1887 –1960) was an army commander and a member of the Royal family of the Ethiopian Empire. From October 1935 to February 1936 Seyoum Mangasha commanded the Army of Tigray. When General Emilio De Bono initially invaded Ethiopia, he was ordered to stay a day's march away from the advancing Italians. Ras Seyoum and forces under his command played significant roles in the Ethiopian Christmas Offensive, the First and the Second Battle of Tembien. On March 31, after his Army of Tigray had already been annihilated, he stood with Emperor Haile Selassie at the Battle of Maychew. But

**R** *Because he collaborated, or why?*

**YBW** Well there was something like that. He had not fought with Haile Selassie as such.

**R** *Like Ras Immeru or others.*

**YBW** Ras Immeru fought.

**R** *Yes; I mean...*

**YBW** But there were reasons why. I think he had some sympathies. You'll look that up and you'll find it, because I don't want to say the wrong thing. I'm not quite certain of it. So he was sort of a guest of the Italians. And he asked permission to the authorities, to take my mother to keep her with him for some time. And he had a Villa. In fact a famous Villa, the name will come back to me in a minute [pause] (*serves coffee*) Do you like it strong or weak?

**R** No it's ok.

**YBW** Actually it's very strong so I'm not sure, we can have it may weaker. (...)

Where was I, Villa Tivoli<sup>19</sup>. You know the place? So that's where we were.

**R** *He was in Villa Tivoli? With his family?*

**YBW** Yes with his family.

**R** *As a guest of the government?*

**YBW** Yes. There was his wife, his son, Ras Mangasha<sup>20</sup>, who is still here, he comes and goes, he lives in the United States. Then there was a grandson, Amde, who was executed by the military government.

**R** *Mengistu?*

**YBW** Yes. (...) And we were there, I don't know for how long, but it was a pleasant stay there. Who was looking after him? How he was being looked after? And we stayed there and that is, when all the prisoners were being returned, we joined them. And we came back home.

**R** *Do you know the date?*

**YBW** No

**R** *But it was in 1941?*

**YBW** No, no, no.

**R** Before?

**YBW** Oh yes, 1939 maybe.

**R** *Already! So under the Duke of Aosta you returned?*

**YBW** Yes. Anyway, just before the war. When did the war start?

**R** The Second World War?

**YBW** Yes.

**R** 1939. September 1939.

**YBW** Must have been 1938 then. Or maybe some time in 1939, I don't know. I can't remember<sup>21</sup>. You can check those dates, I'm sure. Me too, but I don't remember, I don't know in fact.

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finally Seyoum surrendered and submitted to the Italians. He spent much of his time under "house arrest" in Addis Ababa. He also played a small part in the liberation of Ethiopia during World War II. Technically on the side of the Italians however, on April 18, 1940, Ras Seyoum Mangasha approached Emperor Haile Selassie to change sides and the two were able to reconcile. Ras Seyoum retained his position as Shum of western Tigray Province. Emperor Haile Selassie held Ras Seyoum in very deep regard, and depended on him as a senior advisor, as he was a member of the Crown Council from 1945 until his death ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyoum\\_Mangasha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyoum_Mangasha)).

<sup>19</sup> Tivoli (RM), Italia

<sup>20</sup> Ras Mengasha Seyoum born in 1926 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mangasha\\_Seyoum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mangasha_Seyoum)).

**R** *But do you know why you were returned?*

**YBW** Why were we taken? It made no sense to me? I don't know, can you guess?

**R** *There was no reason given to you, neither for deportation nor for returning?*

**YBW** Even soldiers I'm sure didn't know why. It wasn't to show us the great roman civilisation, because, we didn't see any of that. We had a taste of it here (*Laughing*). We didn't see any of it. In fact I learned about Roman civilization much later (*laughing*)

**R** *When you studied, I guess?*

**YBW** Yes.

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<sup>21</sup> Martino Mario Moreno, director of the political office at the Ministry of Italian Africa send Enrico Cerulli, one of the directors at the Ministry on a visit to Asinara to verify the situation of the prisoners. Cerulli proved unjust treatment of the inmates, and found a lot of collaborators who had been "rewarded" for their cooperation with Italians with imprisonment. After Cerulli's visit Moreno recommended in June 1938 gradual repatriation of the Ethiopian deportees, examining every single case individually, beginning with women and children. Mussolini decided that those whose presence in Ethiopia posed no political problems to the Italian colonial administration at Addis Abeba should be released and returned, others should be relocated under police supervision to Obbia and Rocca Littorio, two camps in Somalia, whereas the Asinara inmates should go to Danane. The imprisoned Ethiopians at Tivoli, Mercogliano e Longobuco should instead stay in their places. It seems that in June 1938 some inmates of Asinara were sent to camps in Somalia. But paper work and bureaucracy slowed down the repatriation. Only at the end of 1938/beginning of 1939 the first Ethiopians returned to Addis Abeba, where they lived confined in houses assigned to them by Italian authorities, under police control, sustained economically by the Italian colonial administration (Sbacchi, Alberto, 1977, Italy and the treatment of the Ethiopian Aristocracy 1937-1940, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1977) p. 215-221).

## Second part

**R** *Well, may you just continue.*

**YBW** I don't know, where have we been?

**R** *We have been in Villa Tivoli. And when you got to join the people.*

**YBW** Well we had a very pleasant stay there. I brought some (*looking for photos*) but very, very little. Because, documents get lost as you move from one place to another. And big families, you know. I just had a couple of pictures from Villa Tivoli. This has nothing to do. This is my mother and her sister who died last year. Older sister, she was two years older.

**R** *But that's here!*

**YBW** Yeah, in Addis Abeba. This is her sister. This is my mother in Italy.

**R** *In the hospital?*

**YBW** In the maternity hospital.

**R** *Do you remember the name of the doctor?*

**YBW** Yes. I don't remember his last name, no, I remember Roberto, that's his first name. I can't remember his last name. In fact, they called him Roberto.

**R** *The son?*

**YBW** Yes, my brother.

**R** *And how did your mother call him?*

**YBW** We called him Roberto until we came back to Ethiopia and give him an Ethiopian name.

**R** *So today he is called?*

**YBW** Mancr. Mancr is her older brother who went to study, who went to France. He was send by the Emperor to study in France. And he died there. He never came back.

**R** *And your brothers are still alive?*

**YBW** No, this one is alive. The middle brother died of cancer some maybe ten years ago, not quite ten.

**R** *How was he called?*

**YBW** Sahalem Michael.

**R** *And he was older than you?*

**YBW** He was a little black shirt. Balilla. (*Laughing*) In Italy. They made him one, they just gave him the uniform.

**R** *In the hospital?*

**YBW** I suppose so, because I have seen him with that. Maybe it was just for a photograph. I didn't see him, maybe he marched along one or two times, but we were never, ever in a structured situation. You know, where we had to do this and that on a regular basis. So maybe they did it for fun, I don't know. But I've seen the uniform.

**R** *He was older than you?*

**YBW** No younger. Two years younger.

**RK** So he was born when?

**YBW** I'm thinking in terms of Ethiopian calendar. He was born in 1925 maybe Ethiopian.

**R** And you have been born in?

**YBW** 1923. He was born in 1925, October '25. I was born I 1923 Ethiopian calendar we was born in 1925, that's it.

**R** *And that means in Gregorian calendar?*

**YBW** In Gregorian calendar I'm not quite sure, is it 1931, maybe my date ...

**R** *I think it's seven years the difference<sup>22</sup>.*

**YBW** 1931, it must have been 1931.

**R** *And him 1933.*

**YBW** Yes. He died, I don't remember the dates, he died, some years back. More than seven anyway. Ten years I think. He (*pointing at a photo on the wall*) is his son, the one of my nephew.

**R** *So you were taken from Villa Tivoli to?*

**YBW** To the port I imagine. I don't remember that part.

**R** *The port of Rome?*

**YBW** What is Ostia? A beach or no? Ostia. It could be, I don't know. The only thing I remember when we got back, is not the boat journey, I don't remember trains either, but I remember a truck, Asmara to... No! Bus, Asmara to Addis Abeba. I remember bus, because there was the driver, and we were seated here. So it couldn't be a truck, right. Because a truck would be covered and we would be climbing from behind, no!? We were near the driver.

**R** *But all people who got deported, were returned back?*

**YBW** I think so<sup>23</sup>.

**R** *Without them who died of course. Or did the bodies also return?*

**YBW** No. No way.

**R** *They were buried in Italy?*

**YBW** I suppose so. Pauper's grave. That's English, pauper's grave is when you have nothing and nobody knows you, the municipality takes care of the body, right? That must be it.

And then in the mortuary, as I told you: this is the hospital, and this is the mortuary. And this is a big building, and we are here and we look out of the window, this is also a big building, but we are right at the bottom, and we see the bodies being cut up. I think they hang them up like this. And dissect them, because I've seen that from my window. It must have been pathology or something like that. So I mean, good entertainment for us (*laughing*). And I'm surprised I never had any nightmares (*laughing*).

**R** *Yeah, really.*

**YBW** Honestly. And a lot of people are bothered by dead bodies and so on, although I never had to touch and dress a dead body. It gives me no special ..., it doesn't worry me.

**R** *This journey from Asmara to Addis took a long time I guess.*

**YBW** I suppose so, I don't remember details, I just remember the driver singing, that's all.

**R** *He was Ethiopian?*

**YBW** No, Italians. It must be military, I don't know.

**R** *Then you came back to Addis, and how was that? You came back to your home?*

**YBW** No, we had no home. We had no home. In fact, we had to stay with relatives. You see, they took everything away and they burned the house. They took what they wanted. They didn't take everything away naturally, they burned it, they just burned it.

**R** *Destroyed everything?*

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<sup>22</sup> A seven- to eight-year gap between the Ethiopian and Gregorian calendars results from alternate calculations in determining the date of the Annunciation of Jesus ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_calendar)).

<sup>23</sup> In June 1938 some inmates of Asinara were sent to camps in Somalia, but most of the Ethiopian deportees only returned home to Ethiopia or to camps in Somalia and Eritrean at the end of 1938/beginning of 1939 (Sbacchi, Alberto, 1977, Italy and the treatment of the Ethiopian Aristocracy 1937-1940, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol 10, No. 2 (1977) p. 215-221).

**YBW** Destroyed everything. We had nothing.

**R** *But when you came back, you were automatically free?*

**YBW** Yes. I mean, they wouldn't have brought us back unless they wanted us to be... they wanted to get rid of us, and they wanted us to be free. We were not free. Because this is a colony anyway. So where would we go? Back to Italy? No, no. And we had no contacts anyway. So there was nothing much, that my mother could do. I think they gave her some allowance for the house<sup>24</sup>. Because my father's house was still standing, even when the Emperor returned, that's when we went back to it. Because they commissioned it and they divided it into two flats. And I think they used it for their officials. Instead of it being one house, it became two.

**R** *The Italians, you mean!?*

**YBW** The Italians, Yes. So, and I think they gave her some allowance for that house. She had nothing to live on. [pause] And I remember her going to the ufficio politico. I don't know why she went there, every now and again I know. I don't know if they called her, she had to apply for, whatever, I have no idea. But she used to go there.

**R** *I guess it was a kind of control that she had to go every week...*

**YBW** Maybe, I don't know.

**R** *It could be another kind of imprisonment, imprisonment at home.*

**YBW** I'm sorry I never asked. I don't know. And another thing: my schooling, my own education started while my father was alive. I had a special tutor, who was a very nice gentleman from the church. And we have this tradition, this very elaborate education that is usually reserved for men, because women marry very early. But my father apparently wanted me to go through that. And he had Methodists, very educated persons from the church. And he wanted him to be my tutor. And that's how I started. And he was very nice, he didn't do it... the traditional way is very strict and you have to be, you know it's awful. But he was always kind, inventive, entertaining, and that's how he taught me to read. And so that was how I was able to write a letter to my father. But then that was cut short. And I didn't go to school in Italy. And when I came back, my mother as I said was living in a relatives' house, for a short time, but of course she couldn't stay there for ever. And I was looking after my brother. I was about seven years older. And it was hard for me. I didn't realize how hard, until afterwards. I look after him, I play with him, and he was, he was always, because he was sick, he was always demanding attention. And he was, he would get sick if he cried too hard. Or if he even laughed too hard. And I had to keep balanced (*laughing*). Can you imagine that? And it didn't work very well. (*Laughing*) And one day, as we were playing, I think I hurt him. When he started crying I was so frightened, I left him, I don't know to whom, and went to bed. And then I didn't know what to say, because he would be sick. And I suppose they were all out. And when they came back, they were going to kill me and I was frightened. And then they couldn't find me, and they were running here and there trying to see where I was and so on. I was in bed and they didn't see me. And I said, «How wonderful», you know, they can't find me. And when they did find me they said, «what's the matter with her, she must be sick». And I said, «ah, good idea». (*laughing*)

**R** *So that was your way of escape.*

**YBW** And that's how I got into school. My mother said, «Aha, I have been so hard on my daughter». This was a sort of a wakeup-call. And she put me in boarding school.

**R** *Under Italian occupation?*

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<sup>24</sup> Repatriation of the Ethiopian deportees caused a serious housing shortage at Addis Abeba. To keep the elite under surveillance in Addis Abeba (Soggiorno obbligatorio), a number of houses with gardens were built for them. The colonial government supported the nobles also financially, paying them "salaries" according to their rank and rents for their houses (Sbacchi, Alberto, 1977, Italy and the treatment of the Ethiopian Aristocracy 1937-1940, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol 10, No. 2 (1977) p. 221 - 226).

**YBW** Under Italian occupation, right after we came back, as I told you, she had this stipend for the house. She was given a certain amount of money, with which she rented a house later on and lived, not only be herself, my grandmother, my aunt who was working, my uncle who was also working, and I suppose they pooled and we lived all together.

But I got into Italian school. And she... You can get there for free. But I think she paid a little something, because there where about two or three of us, who were being cared for. I didn't stay there very long, but at least for a little while (*laughing*) I got free from my brother, looking after my brother.

**R** *But you liked the school?*

**YBW** It was alright. It didn't mean much to me, really, we didn't learn very much, you know. You are not allowed to teach natives too much, so well, I suppose, I think perhaps I left because my mother couldn't cope with the payment. So she put me in a day school. A little closer to where she lived.

**R** *But this class in the school was only Ethiopian people?*

**YBW** Oh yes. We don't go together! With Italians?! Oh no!

**R** *Was there a segregation, a separation?*

**YBW** Yes, the city was divided into «mercato indigeno», you know that part, you have been there<sup>25</sup>? OK, that's the part of town, reserved for the natives. And they were developing it to, you know, you were not supposed to live on this side. Let me tell you: Asmara, or Eritrea, that's how they lived. My uncle, my brother's younger brother, started working with the British during the British Occupation. I think they were recruiting people who speak English, a little French, a little something there and so on. So he went to Asmara with the British, I think they were training few people for various functions. And he was, ... Have you been to Asmara?

**R** *No.*

**YBW** He was in a Hotel, staying in the Hotel the famous Ciao Hotel they called it. And he said, it was amazing, five o'clock, or six o'clock, I can't remember, you see all the black people get out of that city. He had come with the British from Addis, staying in the Ciao Hotel where no black man ever stayed, and he would look from the balcony, he can see people walking out of the city. And they come in the morning, to provide service, and leave the city in the evening. And that is how the city, this part of the colony was also supposed to be administered, because there was no difference actually.

**R** *So, you were not allowed to go in certain areas, which were areas for white?*

**YBW** In the daytime yes, you can, because if you are a servant, if you are serving in the shop, in the house in wherever, if you are working in the streets you have to be there.

**R** *But for example theatres, or cinemas, or entertainment, was it allowed, or was it separated?*

**YBW** Maybe the seats might be. Because there weren't so many cinemas, and either you can't go or it must be the seats that must be separated. The City was not so developed, that you can duplicate every service.

**R** *I mean I just heard from Somalia, that people there were not allowed to go to cinema. There was a relatively rigid kind of Apartheid in this way.*

**YBW** Who can I ask? Yes, there is somebody I can ask, actually. There is one person in the family that still might have some information. But I don't, I wouldn't know. Anyway, the administration would have been the same as Eritrea. Maybe not as Asmara. Somalia, there was nothing, so you can just build something here and say, «No blacks!». But here both these part are relatively better developed,

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<sup>25</sup> The Addis Abeba development plan aimed a clear separation of European and Ethiopian population of the town. The north-eastern district *Mercato Indigeno* housed the autochthonous population. Till today the district is called *Mercato*, even if officially it's name changed to *Addis Ketema*

([http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano\\_regolatore\\_di\\_Addis\\_Abeba\\_del\\_1938#Il\\_quartiere\\_indigeno](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_regolatore_di_Addis_Abeba_del_1938#Il_quartiere_indigeno)).

than Somali Part. So, you know, it might be difficult to arrange it that way, I imagine, I don't know. Anyway, where do we go from...

**R** *You went to school and then got out and got to the day school you said.*

**YBW** Right, I went to the day school and I was going on a daily basis with my brother and another cousin. We'd walk through a thick forest, a beautiful forest right across to La Consolata. It is the nuns' School. But my brother and my cousin went to a government school, Italian government. Principe di Piemonte, I think, something like that. It was for the sons of people who were serving the government maybe, I don't know. Although both, my cousin and my brother had no fathers. I don't know what the qualifications were, but there were people like that in that school. I don't think there was any fee paid. It was run by the government. And I think it goes up to third grade maybe. Maximum fourth, I doubt it, that it can go on beyond that.

**R** *Elementary school so to say.*

**YBW** Yes.

**R** *And you yourself didn't continue school under the Italians?*

**YBW** No, with 1941 the government, the Emperor returned. So I went to Ethiopian school after that.

**R** *So let's may come to that point, how did the Italian occupation end? What are your memories about that?*

**YBW** Well as I said, there were these soldiers, it was a vivid memory, that they left. And the British came and although...

**R** *But they escaped, was it a kind of hurry?*

**YBW** Yes, they were in a hurry to go. But what happened to them individually I would not know. But there was no fighting when they went. They were well camouflaged. Because of the trees, I think that's why they chose that place. But then they had to leave. They left just before the re-occupation of Addis Abeba. But they might have surrendered? I have no idea. I wouldn't know.

**R** *Do you have any remembrance of fighting, shootings?*

**YBW** Well bombing, yes. I remember. But there was no sort of street fighting or anything like that.

**R** *British Air Force bombing...*

**YBW** Yes, I think so, because, well at least I remember silence. But I don't remember anything being bombed. No I don't remember that. We had to go ... There were arrangements, so that we could keep safe. We were told what to do, where to go and so on, the families were told. And so on, and then there were silence, I have heard those. But I don't remember bombing as such. Maybe they just came and went. I don't know. I don't remember. I don't even remember any reporting of such<sup>26</sup>.

**R** *Then the Emperor came back.*

**YBW** Yes, he didn't come right away. The British occupied and there were some renegotiations because of the political situation. At first they didn't want the Emperor to come at all. And then when he managed to claim... well, the British led him, because of their own political reasons. And they didn't want him to come right a way and so on, it was complicated. But he came back a few months after the British.

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<sup>26</sup> In January 1941 Allied Forces began almost simultaneously three attacks on Italian East Africa. Anglo-Indian troops under General Platt entered Eritrea by Sudan and conquered the Ethiopian Tigray-region, British-Ethiopian troops, including Emperor Haile Selassie I, attacked 500 km more south heading for Addis Abeba and General Cunningham liberated with his troops first Somalia, then the Harrar-region. Cunningham reached Addis Abeba on April 5<sup>th</sup> 1941, and Haile Selassie I entered on Mai 5<sup>th</sup> the same year. On Mai 19<sup>th</sup> the Italian occupation troops surrendered unconditionally. Only troops under General Gugliermo Nasi denied surrender and resisted the British attacks at Gondar till November 27<sup>th</sup> (Mattioli, Aram, 2005, *Experimentierfeld der Gewalt. Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung 1935-1941*, Zurigo: Orell Füssli Verlag, p. 165; Pankhurst, Richard, 2001, *The Ethiopians. A History*, Oxfon: Blackwell Publishers, p.248).

**R** *What did change under the British Occupation? In your life?*

**YBW** Nothing.

**R** *You didn't go to school?*

**YBW** Ah, well the school that I went to, it was run by the nuns, so whether I went to or not, I don't remember. So I could have. These nuns, did they run away? I don't remember. I don't remember.

**R** *But where did you live on? You said the Italians gave you some money assistance; the English also gave you some assistance?*

**YBW** No, as I said, we lived in this compound, and some of those members of the family had certain incomes. So, if one went my mother's was perhaps in addition to that kept with the families together. But, I suppose we could manage. There is this tradition in Ethiopian households, which is now no longer applicable. You have food for a year in the house. You prepare everything and you know, you don't go shopping, grocery shopping every day. You know you can even manage a wedding, more or less. So I don't think we could be hungry over night. So I really don't know, but people, my uncle was working a little bit, so was my aunt and so on. But I doubt that we would be hard up for such a short time. And when the Emperor came back, we were put in government schools right away. I went to boarding school, my brothers went to boarding school, and I suppose my mother also got back some of her... there is land from which you bring food and so on. So that will be automatic, she wouldn't have too hard, too difficult a time proofing that this is what she had. Shouldn't be difficult<sup>27</sup>.

**R** *So then life came back to normality, or how can we call it, what was life under Haile Selassie after this experience of the Italian occupation?*

**YBW** Well for me, I had no father. Going to school is a big experience and there was always talk of for school children to do well, so that we could be sent abroad to study. Because there weren't any teachers here, you know, the school, you know, could not go beyond sixths grade or anything like that. School did not mean much, but it was helpful. And so really as a child that was my interest. I was not too much preoccupied in the, what was going on in administration and all that.

**R** *But I mean the country and the town was mostly destroyed by the Italians or not?*

**YBW** No destroyed in the sense that you see... First they were insecure enough to kill and to destroy a lot, but that stopped. And what they were trying to do was, contain, you know, the freedom fighters in the, wherever they were so that they would not be too strong. But in any case because of the British or whatever they were driven out. But they did build roads. They had a lot of structures. So you can't say, that they left you destroyed, no, they didn't. You see, the government buildings and everything, there was a lot. In fact, there were more buildings after the Italians left, I would say. So, there may not have been any cash, but you could start, there was something to start with. And the schools... Were there any schools the Italians build? The Principe I think only. The old schools were still there, so children could go to school.

**R** *Did you reflect in school this period? Did you talk about Italian occupation in school? After, during the end 40s?*

**YBW** No, but there was some sort of propaganda type of songs and so on, how we were delivered, we are no happy and so on, you know what I mean That's what goes on. Really, otherwise no, there was nothing like that. And then there were many Italians that stayed behind. And nothing happened to them. They just continued to go on living, yes. They said, there was a war, now it's , you see ... I suppose these were Italians who came in as traders and so on. And you know, they had no

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<sup>27</sup> „Martino Mario Moreno, director of the political office at the Ministry of Africa, complained that the exiles were being sent out of the country precipitately. They had no chance to provide caretakers for their property, and Italians in Ethiopia were encouraged as a result to take possession of their estates, sometimes without even paying rent“ (Sbacchi, Alberto, 1977, Italy and the treatment of the Ethiopian Aristocracy 1937-1940, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol 10, No. 2 (1977) p.214).

significance, negative image that they would give. And I think there was some pronouncement, must have been made by the government also. You are likely to find that information if it is there. But no, there was nothing like that.

**R** *It's strange, I mean we talk about hundred thousands of Ethiopians killed, people deported to Italy into camps, all this war atrocities, the gas war, the executions, the burning the houses, so many war crimes also, it is really astonishing to me that you say, afterwards the relation with the Italians was good.*

**YBW** No, the thing is, remember, I'm talking from the point of view of a child. Ok? And I was very unhappy that I did not have my father. That was in my own mind, otherwise I just went to school, came back and that's it. To me the routine is changed. This is the routine. Otherwise, what the others are talking about I really don't know.

**R** *So we may make a jump, when you were older, what about commemoration or reflection in Ethiopian Society after this experience?*

**YBW** Well there were some very unhappy moments. When the mass graves were discovered, I think the government. It didn't take very long actually, so and we were, many people were very hopeful, because people who had relatives missing, they gave information as to identification, and so on. So did my mother. And we tried to find out my fathers' remains would be found. Many were found. But we did not find my father's remains. So there was a sort of a mass funeral ceremony in the cathedral, and that made me very unhappy and very reflective, even as a child.

**R** Which year was it, immediately after?

**YBW** Almost I can't remember 1941, '42, maybe '42, something like that, it was almost immediately after. And I was always hopeful, whenever they found some obscure graves somewhere and so on. So my mother said that he had a ring with his names on it. And nothing ever happened. So we never found it. But they killed him not in war, he died in the city. So what they did with body, we don't know that kind of thing, we don't know.

**R** *These mass graves, where were they found, only here in Addis Abeba or also in other places?*

**YBW** I don't know. I think I'm talking about Addis Abeba. So if there were other places? I doubt if there were other places, maybe Debre Libanos, because they did a lot of killing in Debre Libanos. But I don't know about that. And after that I don't remember Italians. You know you go to town and there were Greek, Armenians and so on, who had always been there anyway, and I know there were Italians who continued to live here, but on a personal level I was never able to say, you know, this was a neighbour, or lived here or there, he did this or that. Later on I knew some Italians, who were working in various places. But they were not significant in my life. So I don't know.

**R** *Then, talking about remembrance or remembrance culture, is there something, I mean we have on one hand this attempt of Haile Selassie to get justice with a trial<sup>28</sup> but here is this story, which Richard Pankhurst analyzed well<sup>29</sup>, about how international community overall the British and The American government tried to impede a trial, a war crime commission on Ethiopian.*

**YBW** Yes, but you see it didn't come to our level, to the level of the man in the streets, because information is not readily available in Ethiopian Society. Not then and not even now, now it is a bit better. But this is at higher political level. It just doesn't trickle down to you. So I've heard this, what

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<sup>28</sup> Command of his Imperial Majesty (a cura di), 1949, *Documents on Italian War Crimes submitted to the United Nations War Crimes Commission by the Imperial Ethiopian Government*, Vol. 1: Italian Telegrams and Circulars, Addis Abeba: Ministry of Justice, Id. 1950, *Documents on Italian War Crimes submitted to the United Nations War Crimes Commission by the Imperial Ethiopian Government*, Vol. 2: Affidavits and published documents, Addis Abeba: Ministry of Justice; New Times and Ethiopia News (edited by Sylvia Pankhurst) 1944, *Italy's War Crimes in Ethiopia*, Addis Abeba: New Times and Ethiopia News

<sup>29</sup> Pankhurst, Richard, 1999, [Italian Fascist War Crimes in Ethiopia: A History of their discussion from the League of Nations to the United Nations \(1936 – 1949\)](#), in: *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1-2 (1999) (New Series) p. 83-140

you say, yes, but it's not something, people would have been aware of. Yes, I remember saying, you know, some families being asked to register, what they lost, and so on. And I remember all this. And I suppose that is when the government was trying to exercise its right to claim and so on. But what happened afterwards... And then I went abroad, quite early, so I don't know.

**R** *You were where?*

**YBW** I went to school abroad, a High School. There was no High School here. So

**R** *But in the States or where?*

**YBW** No, no, I went to ... was it Palestine at that time? (*Laughing*) Ramallah.

**R** *Oh that is interesting.*

**YBW** It is

**R** *So in the time Israel was founded?*

**YBW** Oh no, long before that. Are you familiar with Jewish Israel history?

**R** Yes.

**YBW** OK, it was an interesting time, because it was British occupied. And I was sick. I went to a Friends School. You know the Society of Friends in Ramallah<sup>30</sup>. And we used to come up for Jerusalem for medical reasons, whatever. And I was in hospital. And I was operated on appendicitis or something like that. When the King David Hotel was blown up<sup>31</sup> - are you familiar with that story? - and the British troops came, I was in a Jewish hospital, a small Jewish Hospital in Jerusalem. And the British thought, the Jews were hiding a terrorist. And they insisted in coming through to the operation room, and found me (*laughing*) on the table. (*laughing*) Quite a terrorist.

**R** *Then you came back to Ethiopia, when?*

**YBW** Oh, much later I mean, I didn't stay in the Lebanon. I went to Lebanon for High School actually, I didn't continue in Ramallah. There were some difficulties. So from High School in Lebanon, and then to Britain.

**R** *To Britain, to study?*

**YBW** Yes.

**R** *What did you study?*

**YBW** Oh well, nothing much really. (*Laughing*)

**R** *Surely.*

**YBW** No. They were difficult times, you know, it was not a time when we were able to study what we wanted and also there wasn't much guidance as to what it would be appropriate and so on. And I was very young when I left home. And I never got over my homesickness. And I wanted to get back home as quickly as possible. So I took the shortest course possible. (*Laughing*)

**R** *Which means?*

**YBW** Which means just some courses in social administration, so that I could be of some service. And that's it, not exactly what I really wanted. But at the same time it gave me freedom too. So I came back and I taught actually for some years.

**R** *Teaching in school?*

**YBW** Yes, it was the easiest thing for me to do. I enjoyed it; it was something I really enjoyed.

**R** *And you taught what?*

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<sup>30</sup> The Ramallah Friends Schools are two elite Private Schools founded and run by Quakers in the city of Ramallah, in the West Bank. The Friends Girls' School was inaugurated in 1869 (<http://www.palfriends.org/>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramallah\\_Friends\\_Schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramallah_Friends_Schools))

<sup>31</sup> July 22, 1946 ([http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/Isource/History/King\\_David.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/Isource/History/King_David.html)).

**YBW** English.

**R** *In secondary schools?*

**YBW** Well, junior secondary.

**R** So you came back in which year?

**YBW** '53 I think.

**R** *Gregorian?*

**YBW** Yes.

**R** *So what was situation ten years after Italian occupation? Was it much changed from what you knew before?*

**YBW** Well a little more settled, yes, I suppose. A lot of students coming back from abroad taking positions in various places, not many, but trickling down, you know, and the government ministries being more structured, more focused, I think. Lots of difficulties, lots of difficulties, but no really ups and downs, there weren't really.

**R** *But did the fact of the occupation reflect itself in Ethiopian history in the 50<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup>?*

**YBW** Well in the 60<sup>th</sup> 70<sup>th</sup> you had the student movement that was eager for change. And was not very happy with this entrenched salomonic type of dynasty, that was so powerful. And it was not, I think...., a lot of people wanted change, but I think the fact that perhaps the government was not responsive in the sense, that it could have been a little more flexible. Instead of that, institutions tend to withdraw into themselves and become more rigid. And I think that invited extremisms, which you know what happened. This opened the way to the socialist influences that became so really negative, produced negative results.

**R** *But did Italian occupation and the war with Italy have a role in history after that, or in politics and society? Or was there absolutely a silence?*

**YBW** Well it was an episode that Ethiopians felt. I think Ethiopians felt, how shall I say it, it was almost an insult, that the Italians dared to come and no matter what. Whatever our way is, this is our way. I mean, it was not spoken of as such, but it was an invasion, it was an occupation that has really left a big black mark on the history. And still no matter who it is, socialist, whoever, I think people feel that that should not have happened. And maybe some blame the regime, but still that is something that happened that we almost want to forget. How could they invade Ethiopia? This sort of thing, you know. So, I don't see that as having any... Well it must have some kind of effect. It opens your eyes to a different type of life that was not there, this is although the Italians that came to Ethiopia were illiterate. Many of them were illiterate. I remember my mother saying, she had a little carriage, a horse drawn cart that she used to go around. And I told you about these soldiers in the woods. And as she was passing through, there was a bunch of soldiers, although they don't wear uniform in the, in that area, this is where they lived, they just relaxed. And they were all huddled together, and focussing on one thing, and when she came in her cart, I don't know what exactly happened, but they suddenly realized that there was a horse and cart and (*the door is opened*) that they have to almost run away. And you know what they were doing? One of them had a letter from home and he was reading it to... you know, there was a letter form home and he was the reader for all the others. They were illiterate; many of them came from down south, Sicily and so on. And many of them were very superstitious. They were no better than the Ethiopian peasant. So, you couldn't even think of them as civilizing Romans. You see what I mean? But they, as I said, they build a lot. They build it for themselves maybe, because they wanted a good administration, that would serve their purpose. But still, I think we deal with it with ambivalence. A little bit of this and a little bit of that. Sometimes you like to think.... we always say: «Ethiopia has never been colonized». That is in our vocabulary. (*conversation with descendant in Amharic*) So we say, we have never been colonized. (*conversation with descendant in Amharic*) So five years colonization yes, but we don't recognize it. It's not there. Did you know that?

**R** Yes, I know that. I mean I talked with a lot of people and I discovered that you are a very proud culture (the door is closed) – with reason, because you are the only African country which has not been colonized.

**YBW** Yes you know, but you know, personally I put it realistically. Maybe I lived through that occupation, the way some others didn't. (*Laughing*) You know, it was an occupation, but you know, you can't just say, it wasn't there. It was there. And it should be a sort of more sobering influence. Maybe that's the way I look at it.

**R** So you mean, it should be a remembrance culture, which is not there in Ethiopia?

**YBW** I don't know. There is a remembrance culture in the sense that's formal. Every year they say, Blabla, you know, and I don't like it. It's not real.

**R** Of course I did not refer to that, but to a positive one. I mean is it a subject, which concerned intellectuals, artists?

**YBW** Artists not so any more, because this generation doesn't really... Let me go back to the Derg Period<sup>32</sup>. It is only eighteen years ago, that the Derg, the military government was overthrown<sup>33</sup>. Young people today don't even care about it. They don't know what they hear just comes in and comes out the other (ear). It should not be like that. On the other hand it's the way my mother said, it should be remembered, but we shouldn't be whining over it. It shouldn't bring us down. No, it should be, we should tell our children, they should know about it and you know we should, without malice, without... I tell you, the perpetrators of the Derg are in prison for 18 years. I cannot stand that, I think it's horrid. That's not the way I want my children to look at my generation. This is not how to deal with it. Why are we keeping them like that? We have... This is not punishment. This way we punish their families. We punish their children. The children who grew up without fathers, without older uncles, whatever, you know. I think we did it better with the Italians, than we did this one. With the Italians I think we made up, more or less quickly. And we are friends and we talk about it, the Italians maybe not so. The Italians will forget. Natural, it's easier for them to forget. And maybe this propaganda should be there. So that children will not forget. But not in the sense that the artists the writers and so on remember, I don't see any of that.

**R** There is no book, no literature which treats this time this period? (the house help brings photos, conversation in Amharic)

**YBW** (*Looking the photos*) This is my mother in Tivoli Gardens.

**R** With whom?

**YBW** With this lady that I told you. She was with on the boat. And this is another lady, who was not imprisoned. I don't remember how she got there. Her sister died in Clinca Tropicale. This lady's sister. And this is Tivoli palace with Ras Seyoum. (*searching*) I'm trying to find out if there is another one from that period. This is my mother in the old times.

**R** Before the occupation.

**YBW** Before the occupation. This is me.

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<sup>32</sup> Derg or Dergue was the name of the military junta that came to power in Ethiopia following the ousting of Haile Selassie and ruled the country from 1974 to 1991. Derg, which means "committee" or "council", is the short name of the *Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derg>, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_history))

<sup>33</sup> The Derg government ended in July 1991 when the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front EPRDF, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and other parties established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) which was composed of an 87-member Council of Representatives and guided by a national charter that functioned as a transitional constitution, till in 1994, a new constitution was written that formed a bicameral legislature and a judicial system. An election took place in May 1995 in which Meles Zenawi was elected Prime Minister and Negasso Gidada was elected President ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_history)).

**R** *Even in Tivoli Garden?*

**YBW** And these are the Tivoli Garden pictures actually, the same three people. And this you have seen already. I had more, but I couldn't find them.

**R** *May I put it in another way. I was astonished, when I looked for it, that I found almost no literature on the subject. No Novels, no historical literature either. And when you come to Addis, you see the Yekatit, you see the Victory monument, but there is no more, there is nothing like a museum or other. So why this lack...?*

**YBW** I don't know. Even Haile Selassie, when he was in power, there were celebrations or remembrance ceremonies and so on for other occasions. And they were given a big, but this has always been small. Actually I felt it at that time. And I think it must have been done on purpose. Although I think at the same time, maybe, I'm not sure, maybe you see everything that was done ceremoniously had to exalt the Emperor. That was the sort of the *raison d'être* for everybody. So you couldn't bring something up to that standard. This is what I felt. And now sometimes I feel, maybe they didn't want to offend the Italians maybe? I don't know. I really have no idea. But as you say, there is not much (*incomprehensible*) regarding this.

**R** *I mean so many people suffered. I'm asking myself, why didn't the people who suffered not pronounce themselves and begin a work of remembering, asking justice?*

**YBW** I think it goes with the way we Ethiopians are. In the sense that we are so used to having things thought out for us by the top, and we don't like to upset the top people. They would have done it if it was necessary. So what can I do on my own, if I bring it up. Nobody else is going to help me. And we are not very good at thinking together, like a group. Somebody is bound to disrupt it. This is cultural. I don't know why it is, but it is there. Even to do something good for the community is very difficult. If it is not being done, then it is something the government might not like. So we try to play it safe. I think this is something that, maybe was not – when I say cultural – it may be an unattained characteristic. Because the old people in the old times, when I read, people were more assertive. They wanted this and they said so. No matter what it took. We tend to comply, in spite of what I think individually.

**R** *Well, when we talk about your personal point of view how is it for you that the situation is like that, I guess you can't forget, what you and your family suffered?*

**YBW** No, I still think it, yes, but there is nothing, as I say, as we all say, there is nothing. As an individual there is no one anybody can do. You have to agree with a group of people, to say, look, this is something let's try and do something about it. It's always difficult.

**R** *But you yourself, do you need justice, and what could be justice?*

**YBW** Justice for me because I lost my father?

**R** *For example, or because you were deported, because your mother was hit, because you had to live in conditions you didn't want to live ....*

**YBW** So many people suffered. And individual suffering means nothing really in Ethiopia. That's what happens to people when there is war. This is the attitude taken, I think. And I don't think I will get any response. Personally there is a vacuum. For me there is a vacuum definitely. My life would have been quite different. This is not what was cut out for me. No.

**R** *How do you feel about it?*

**YBW** Well this is it. I don't tend to look back now. You know I have lived with it for so long, so what can I do. It's unfortunate. But you know, the way I felt about it maybe you will understand when I tell you that during the Derg Period, after Haile Selassie was removed, and the Emperor was removed... Well, let me not put it that way, not when he was removed, when the old regime fell. I'm not thinking about it in any personal way, there were a lot of people who came from the backwoods, who have been imprisoned who have been destroyed and they showed up and they were alive. And sometimes people did not even know they were still alive. Because in the old regime also people disappeared and

so on. So these things happened during the other regimes also. And then I was hopeful that my father would come. (*The house help comes in conversation in Amharic*) I really thought my father would show up. Maybe he is hiding somewhere, maybe he was been held up somewhere, I thought. – would you like another cup of coffee? She is not a coffee drinker, so she is not very good at making it. (*Laughing*) We always say, if you don't like coffee, ...

**R** ... you don't make a good coffee, yes, that's right! (pause)

**YBW** And it really took me quite a long time. I mean I was not young, but I still thought, maybe that will happen. And things like that happen in Ethiopia. You know, a lot of people who disappeared during the Derg showed up after that regime fell also. People whom we thought have died.

**R** *How did you talk about it in your family, did you talk about it?*

**YBW** Yeah, we talk about it, and that's how you survive: you talk about it, and we remember the day, when we left home, we remember the day they say they killed him. And Ethiopians have a way of remembering the year. Every year you remember that, specially in the church calendar, the first year, the seventh year, the fourteenth year. And you go on and on and on. But we have to stop some time.

**R** *But was important for you to give it to your children, this history?*

**YBW** Oh yes. My children are aware of it.

**R** *And for you it was important, why?*

**YBW** Why? They have to know, it's their history. It's their history, they may not know all the details, but they do know. [pause]

**R** *I've got two more questions in this regard. One is, we had already, as you also mentioned collaborators. Ethiopians collaborating with the Italian regime, what about them? Was this a subject? And where they judged, after that in the Haile Selassie regime, or were they just integrated into the system?*

**YBW** A little bit of both. A little bit of both. There was no big ... There may have been a big fish or two. Like the Dejazmach Haile Selassie<sup>34</sup>, the grandson of Yohannes, King Yohannes<sup>35</sup>, who openly rejected the Emperor who was also his father in law. He was the husband of one of his daughters, although she died earlier. I think he had been slighted, he felt, maybe I don't know. There was something like that and then he almost died as a prisoner. But when the regime fell, I think he came out of prison and died later on. He was imprisoned by the British also. He was in the Seychelles Islands for a long time<sup>36</sup>.

**R** *Because of collaboration with the Italians?*

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<sup>34</sup> Dejazmach Haile Selassie Gugsu went over to the advancing Italians and announced his submission to Italian rule on 10 October 1935 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haile\\_Selassie\\_Gugsu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haile_Selassie_Gugsu)).

<sup>35</sup> Yohannes IV was Emperor of Ethiopia from 1872 until his death March 10, 1889 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yohannes\\_IV\\_of\\_Ethiopia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yohannes_IV_of_Ethiopia)).

<sup>36</sup> The British took Dejazmach Haile Selassie Gugsu into custody and kept him first in British held Asmara. The government of Emperor Haile Selassie I approached the British administration and listed the crimes and treason of Haile Selassie Gugsu and requested his extradition. The British indicated that they would extradite him only after obtaining a promise that his punishment would not include death. However, the British ultimately removed Haile Selassie Gugsu from Asmara and sent him to the Seychelles for safe keeping. In 1946, after continued requests for extradition, Haile Selassie Gugsu was returned to the Ethiopians. In 1947, he stood trial and was declared a fascist collaborator and a traitor. Haile Selassie Gugsu then threw himself on the mercy of the Emperor. As a result, his death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He was placed under house arrest at Gore, and later at Ambo for twenty-eight years. When the Derg toppled the Ethiopian monarchy in 1974 Dejazmach Haile Selassie Gugsu was freed. However, even after he was released, the Derg continued to regard him as a fascist collaborator and as a traitor to his country. Haile Selassie Gugsu remained under effective house arrest at Ambo in western Ethiopia from that point on although technically no longer a state prisoner. Haile Selassie Gugsu died in early 1975 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haile\\_Selassie\\_Gugsu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haile_Selassie_Gugsu)).

**YBW** Yes. And then he was also ... His sister is still alive; she was with him, very young, much younger sister, when he was imprisoned. I think he was a sort of, like a guardian to her. And I think she ended up going to prison with him to the Seychelles. In the way the Emperor treats such things, you know, he was condemned to death, but this was never executed. He was never executed and then he was given to one of the provincial governors to look after. That's one of his first duties, to see, that he is looked after. He would live, maybe even with his wife, in a very simple way, but he would be guarded. And he was guarded for life almost. And then when the regime fell, I think he came out of prison, but died soon after. There were some like that. But this is a really big fish. But the others no. They just left them and nothing really happened to them. Depending on how much they did. You know, if they didn't have any people executed or whatever, I imagine this is what happened, so they may not have been successful in whatever they were doing, but I think generally speaking, they just continued on with their lives.

**R** *But were there trials?*

**YBW** No. Not that I know of. Well, before the Emperor came to Addis, I think some kind of list was given to the son. The youngest son of the Emperor came with the British. And he was in the Palace, he met with the survivors and with everybody and so on. And then I don't know what happened, but some people were detained, because of collaboration with the Italians, presumably because of that. And presented to this Prince Makonnen<sup>37</sup>, he was told that these were the collaborators. I don't remember exactly what happened, but in the Place he came to see them and he saw my mother among them. Yes. Because somebody must have said she was a collaborator. And then this prince said, «No, no, not Beshah-Woured's wife, it's impossible, you must let her go. We know exactly what happened to her». And my mother said, «No, I will not be send home, I want this investigated.» So it was agreed that she should be the sort of .... The local administrator, the person in charge of local administration will take charge of her. And she was allowed to live in his house for a while, until they investigated and found out, why, who and why she was detained. I don't know the end of the story. I know that she was released, that's all. So there were some people who were initially detained, I don't know were there any trails or not. I don't really know, I don't think so.

**R** *You surely know Richard and Sylvia Pankhurst. She tried already in 1945 to make some information campaign about Italian war crimes.*

**YBW** Ok what happened?

**R** *Yes what happened?*

**YBW** You see, there is a gap for me in this part, the part you are talking about. I was out in 45.

**R** Nothing happened, I mean, she tried...

**YBW** I think his mother Sylvia tried... And I think there were some war operations. But no war crime. What I have heard is that the British and the Americans got in the way, they didn't want this to go on. Something like that.

**R** *Yes, I mean there were war crimes, a lot of war crimes.*

**YBW** Of course there were. So this... it couldn't go on without their cooperation. So I think this is what happened. But on a daily basis, my world was not within that between '45 and '53 I was out of Ethiopia And I couldn't... I left November '45.

**R** *When we talk about deportation, there were also these camps in the region, not in Ethiopia, but Danane in Somalia*

**YBW** Yes. There were some people who went to Danane and other places also.

**R** *Which places?*

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<sup>37</sup> Prince Makonnen Haile Selassie, Duke of Harar (16 October 1923 - 13 May 1957) was the second son, and second youngest child, of Emperor Haile Selassie I ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince\\_Makonnen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Makonnen)).

**YBW** I'm trying to remember. Danane, you just mentioned it. But there is another one.

**R** *Nocra?*

**YBW** Yes, Nocra and Danane. I don't think many Ethiopians survived in Nocra and Danane. Just it is horrible for highland people it's very difficult to survive in such places. You know highlanders are very sensitive to heat and that kind of hardship. The other way is much easier. When you go up the mountain, all you have to do is get more to wear. There are some survivors of Nocra, and I don't know, Nocra or Danane, Yes I know some.

**R** *You know some?*

**YBW** Yes, I know a couple of people but I don't know if they are willing to talk. One of them a survivor, although we didn't want her to talk about Danane, somebody wanted to talk to her about something else, she wasn't very willing. I don't know if she would talk about Danane. It should be quite innocuous. I don't know.

**R** *Maybe you can ask them, if they want or not?*

**YBW** I can find out.

**R** *That would be really nice, because it is so difficult and about Nocra there is almost none information. Do you have information about these two camps?*

**YBW** Never heard. (*Stands up, goes to the door and lets some people come in*). Nocra I've never heard of anybody.

**R** *And about Danane what did you hear?*

**YBW** Just people who have been there.

**R** And what did they tell?

**YBW** There was one person I knew. But he is dead now. He was... he told me about his friend who was eaten by rats. He survived. I suppose when he was asleep. He was bitten, not eaten. Something like that. But I don't remember, really. The man died anyway, the one who told me. You know lot's of people of my mothers' generation have died. My mother is one of the very few survivors. She is also not really in a good position to talk<sup>38</sup>, so...

**R** *But I mean these camps, Nocra and Danane had a totally different role, is my impression, in the Italian System?*

**YBW** I think very ... it was as purposeless as the others. Because I don't think they had any targeted people. It was just to mystify and terrorize the rest of the population. I think that's the only reason. Because this two people I know, they were young women, maybe widows, or maybe their husbands were refugees or whatever, who knew nothing about anything. And they were just there and probably won't even talk to you, because they are the type housebound-never-knew-anything. So, why take them? [Pause] I don't think they abused them, the Italians, in the sense that you would abuse young women. No. I think it is just to terrorize them. I think this is what happened. And it does terrorize. You see, when part of the population is abroad under different, horrible conditions the rest are subdued. This works. Even with our own terrorists, our own dictators, that's exactly what they do.

**R** *But I mean it's not a case that the elite has been deported, it was not the masses, it was not the mass-population, it was educated people, the elite of the country, right?*

**YBW** Yes, but it was a mix. They didn't take people from the streets, but the elite and some of their servants. Just people. Yes, as you say, the elite.

**R** *But you say it's arbitrary, it's an arbitrary system?*

**YBW** Yes, it is arbitrary in the sense that they were not targeted. These people where not targeted because of what they said or did. So it is arbitrary. Even if is only one section of the population.

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<sup>38</sup> Sara Gebruyesus Beshah-Woured Habtewold passed away in December 2011.

**R** *But because of what they were targeted and deported?*

**YBW** Why were they deported? To terrorize the rest of the population. To subdue.

**R** *OK, but why the elite?*

**YBW** Well, if you take a bunch of people nobodies, nothing much is going to be heard about them. As much as you would say «Oh, so and so is away in Italy» Or so and so. I mean these are people, people remember. But if you take a number of nameless people, yes, oh yes, who knows who they are. I don't think it works. Although there were such people among them. You get my point. – Oh my god... *(it begins to rain)* (...)

**R** *Well, I don't know if you want to add something.*

**YBW** I don't know, I don't think so, it is a lot, but I hope I have been helpful.

**R** *Of course, it is so important to conserve these memories. That's why, if you really know people, who are alive, I would be very happy.*

**YBW** I don't know if I can find them, but I will ask. One of them lives in the United States. Unless they are younger than my mother, it's very difficult for me to talk to them. Anyway I'll find out. (...) It takes time. (...) There is one person, not because he was imprisoned, but seems to know so much. I've heard him being interviewed on the radio. I don't know if he is still alive, but he should be. Let me try and find out. I don't know him, but he sounds very interesting, and he talks dates, places, names, a wonderful person to talk to. If you could find him and of he has the right information, I don't know. But about this period he has been saying so much, that I was really impressed. So I don't know if he went to war, or was imprisoned, I have no idea<sup>39</sup>. [pause)

Do you know this place I told you about, the Città Universitaria? You'll go and find the mortuary. And you tell me if it looks like what I *(laughing)* ...*(exchange of addresses)* Via Piero Calamandrei

**R** *Piero Calamandrei, he was a famous antifascist.*

**YBW** Hm, was he? I don't know antifascists, I only knew fascists *(laughing)* It's true.

**R** *I know.*

**YBW** And I know some fascist songs too.

**R** *Like?*

**YBW** Oh yes, "*Faccetta nera, piccola abissina*"<sup>40</sup> You know that? You know it, right.

**R** *I heard about it.*

**YBW** Famous singer, Carlo Buti. And another one, *Addio* somebody. *Cara Virginia, parto in Abissinia, .. eh, vado in Abissinia, ma tornerò.* You know that one?

**R** *No.*

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<sup>39</sup> Email exchange in May 2010: YSB (May 5<sup>th</sup>): Dr. Mulugeta Wedajo served as academic Vice President in the Haile Selassie I University before the revolution. His father was Ethiopian consul assigned to Eritrea when it was an Italian colony. The family was imprisoned in Italy. I am not sure if the father was imprisoned or killed. I may be wrong about Lungobucco which is a name I heard often in connection with the prisoners in Italy. Need more time to clarify. (May 5<sup>th</sup>): Just found out "Lungo Buco" (sic!) is/was a small town in or around the hills of Calabria. (info courtesy local FM radio). 16 Ethiopian prisoners preceded the writer of a book being read on FM. They were later joined by a few more from Asinara, when the majority were repatriated. Amazing coincidence! Also learnt that Negadras Wedajo Ali -- the father of Dr Mulugeta -- Was among those not allowed repatriation. He died in Lungobuco. The Prince, Ras Immiru was held in Panza (I think it should be Ponza). No details reported about whereabouts and how many prisoners were with him. The book is a mine of information about Ethiopian prisoners and life in rural Italy at the time. I would like to get hold of it -- will try my best. (May 6<sup>th</sup>): It is a book by a prominent Ethiopian author -- Haddis Alemayehu - am not sure of the name but would love to have a go at translating it. He died a couple of years ago. Will keep working on this. For Haddis Alemayehu ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haddis\\_Alemayehu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haddis_Alemayehu)) see his written testimony THA1.

<sup>40</sup> Popular marching song of Italy's Fascist regime composed in occasion of the Italian invasion in Ethiopia by Giuseppe Micheli ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faccetta\\_Nera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faccetta_Nera)).

**YBW** *Appena giunto, nel appartamento, or something like that, ti manderò dall’Africa un bel fior*<sup>41</sup>  
(*laughing*) OK. They called me Stella.

**R** *The Italians?*

**YBW** Yes, because they can’t say Yeweinshet, they didn’t try. [pause] You know, when my daughter had a girl, she called her Koka, which is Stella, and I said, «well that’s my name». And she said, «How come». And I said, «well, you know, I used to be called Stella a long time ago.» (*Laughing*)

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<sup>41</sup> The military song composed by Giuseppe Perotti in 1935 is «Ti saluto, vado in Abissinia»: «Io ti saluto vado in Abissinia / cara Virginia, ma tornerò./ Appena giunto nell’accampamento/ dal reggimento ti scriverò./ Ti manderò dall’Africa un bel fior / che nasce sotto il ciel dell’equator» I salute you, I’ll go in Abyssinia / beloved Virginia, but I will return. / As soon as I reached the encampment / from the regiment I will write to you. / I will send you from Africa a beautiful flower / born under the sky of the equator.