

**Book Review - Ethiopia: Red Terror's  
Bitter Legacy:  
By Berhane Tadese, New York City  
July 20, 2015**

Hosted by Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance Association (ECMAA), Ato Nesibu Sebhat came to New York City on July 19, 2015 at Tsion café in New York City to talk about his new book entitled *Fistum Naew Emnetae* “ፍፁም ነው እሞነቴ” . Some of us do not want to be reminded of the past. Some of us indeed wish to do something to benefits for the people left behind. It is either bad or good we all share many things in common, we love our country and want to know what happened during that difficult time. The book contains personal experience and recollection of victims of the historical terrifying events of Red Terror political campaign as it happened in one of Addis Ababa neighborhood known as Kassanchese (Kefteгна 15).

The moderator Ms. Makda Amare, introduced the author and set the ground rule of the review. She emphasized the primary reason of this book review is to educate the community untold part of recent history. The book is a testament of a man who had been part of the youth struggle who were in their teens or twenties that have made the ultimate sacrifices for Ethiopian people rights in 1974 revolution.

As you listen to his vivid story, it takes you back to “radical” Ethiopian Student Movement, the good and bad memories of the late 1960s and 1970s of the revolution period. The stories demonstrated that the young men and women sacrifice courageously out of their convictions to free the Ethiopian oppressed people. Their story should be told and retold in history books. They stood for democracy in the face of the tyrant regime and amazingly fought with whole hearted devotion. It is a lesson for Ethiopian youth both at home and abroad to carry on this struggle for establishment of democracy and rule of law for Ethiopian people.

The revolution that erupted in 1974 is a great landmark in Ethiopian history. Several books have been written about it. But the history of Red Terror unfortunately remains not fully reported and documented. The military junta (better known as the Derg) ruled the country for seventeen years with unbounded political authority. The regime declared the Red Terror, a public harassment campaign; by imprisoning, torturing, and executing those who opposed the military junta. From the very early beginning, two months after it assumed power on November 23, 1974, Derg executed 60 officials of the previous Imperial government high ranking officials and jailed hundreds of civil service officials, business men and feudal lords without trial. The book entitled *Fistum Naew Emnetae* written by Nesibu Sebhat tells the story of red terror and its bitter legacy. The book is divided into four sections and with several sub-sections. Kefteгна 15 is a prison where the author’s ordeal took place. The introduction is pre red terror story related to the author’s childhood life. He tells his own story as a boy growing up in Kassanchese area, including schooling, his insights into Ethiopia People Revolution Party (EPRP) and the youth league’s clandestine organizational structures. He continues to tell how he was involved in politics, his untyring effort for his party to gain an influential role in the struggle, followed by numerous challenges of political struggle that include noticing friends and members shifting loyalties from his party to opposite party, the revelation of division within his own clandestine party, and random

imprisonment. The final section tells the story of the arrest of the top notorious prison guard leader of Kefetegn 15 in the US.

Limited number of authors have written a book about red terror. The book *Fisum Naew Emmetae* is attempting to close the gap of red terror accounts by exposing the brutality that took place inside his prison cell by derg loyalist. Mr. Nesibu tells the very personal story of his experience as a prisoner in Kefteгна 15 prison. He tells this story from his recollection and also with help of others oral testimony of former prisoners.

Red Terror was a violent political campaign conducted between 1977 and 1978. The regime arrested thousands of suspected EPRP members and EPRP youth league members as prisoners. All of them were held without any charges. Some prisoners could not stand the torture in prison and admit “guilt” whether they are or not member of EPRP. Methods of torture used by guard were gruesome. Nesibu was brutally tortured and had heard agonizing screams from fellow prisoners during torture. Prisoners were summarily executed by prison guards in the prison compound. He witnessed the guards carry the dead bodies in trucks and bury them in unmarked mass graves. He observed the guards stealing food brought to prisoners by the families and friends. This food theft left the prisoners always on the brink of starvation. The red terror campaign inflicted physical and psychological damage to countless prisoners. It is mind boggling to imagine that the author and some of the youth remained defiance during harsh interrogation to keep the party’s secrets. According to Nesibu, this heroic defiance originated from absolute commitment to the promise made by party members to keep struggle live until the oppressed people are free.

The talk and discussion with author under the book signing event provided a launching pad in sharing thoughts and opinion on the past, present and future socio-political issues. It is one way to remember the sacrifice they made in their hope we may live in peace and freedom in Ethiopia. This book by no means a full story of a red terror legacy, but it included several firsthand stories of red terror. Thanks is extended to Nesibu Sebhat for his attempt to give legitimate place in history about the struggle of the young generation of 1970s for freedom of all Ethiopians.