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## **Addis Ababa University Students' Movement: The Case of Tilāhun Gizāw's Assassination and Its Immediate Aftermath**

**Seltene Seyoum\***

### **Introductory Background**

This section briefly deals with the educational background of the author as well as the core of the theme under discussion. I joined Addis Ababa University (AAU), then called Haile Selassie I University (HSIU) through Prince Bā'edā – Māriām Mäkonnen Laboratory School (popularly known as Lab School) in 1967 (1960 EC). Bā'edā – Māriām was a one year grade 12 preparatory school for university education. It used to enroll grade 11 complete students with good academic performance in grades 9, 10 and 11 and who also successfully score good results in an entrance examination set by the Faculty of Education. The examination was administered to grade 11 students in all high schools throughout the country. It consisted of the English language, mathematics, natural sciences (physics, chemistry and biology), social sciences (geography and history) as well as aptitude. The primary objective of the school was to provide competent instructors for senior secondary schools after four years of university education.

Bā'edā – Māriām was a boarding school housed within *Sedest Kilo* Campus, Addis Ababa University. Its facilities like offices, classrooms, laboratories (labs) and library extended from the current office of the Institute of Educational Research to the place where Mandela Building stands today. The school had a good library with recent publications as well as excellent labs for physics and chemistry students. I say this because I was in the Science Stream, making use of both laboratories. Among others, the late Dr. Legese Wätāro, physics instructor in the Faculty of Science, *Arāt Kilo* campus and I were used to compete particularly in physics lab works. Mrs. Verges, a physics instructor, used to coach us closely. But when I joined the university, I chose the Social Science Stream.

Extra - curricular activities took place on the current football field of AAU, that is, adjacent to the school from the east. There were also small fields for basketball and volleyball along the south-western extreme of the field. Student

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\* Associate Professor, History, Unity University, Addis Ababa; Cell: +251-911-87-44-80;  
Email: [selteneseyoum1@yahoo.com](mailto:selteneseyoum1@yahoo.com);

dormitories were, however, modest, accommodating a big number of students per each hall. Evening studies took place under supervision in classrooms until 10 PM in the night. Students made use of the university students' cafeteria, that is, the multi-purpose Christmas Hall as well as other student recreation centers. The teaching staffs, who were, in the main, composed of UN, British and Ethiopian staff were highly competent, hardworking and helpful. I had a strong admiration for Mrs. Verges (Indian), Mr. Grisdale (British) and Mr. Urbani (Italian, UN staff). They were physics, geography and mathematics instructors respectively. They were immensely admired by their students for their competence in the subject, commitment to the teaching profession and readiness to give advice and assist students.

I had a long stay at AAU, learning and studying at BA, MA and PhD levels. During my graduate and postgraduate studies, I was placed in the Department of History of the same university. In this narration I would like to narrate the memories I have had, of which some were gentle and, hence, nostalgic and others were vicious and, hence, hateful. From the latter events, I cannot draw any parallel to my memory of an awful and beastly event as that of the 29<sup>th</sup> day of December 1969 which not only took the life of several students but also left hundreds of others (like myself) (including high school students) spiritually hurt for life. Worse, the terrible massive gun shots sustained by the military forces over peacefully gathered students within the *Sedest Kilo* Campus of AAU, just in front of the Arts Building (today's Old Classroom Building (OCR)) – was a cruel act deliberately perpetrated by government forces, that is, notably, the Imperial Bodyguard. The Police Forces were not active participants in the university - based military operation that day as some people may think. They were noticeably placed off- campus except some whom we encountered on the University Football Field who chased us on our flight from the university compound to outside. This was the day when perhaps the biggest number of university and high school students ever gathered together to express their solidarity against the Haile Selassie regime over the assassination of Tilāhun Gizāw, the president of the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA) the previous day. However, the students who have been crying for their people to have a better living and justice were denied even to peacefully bury the body of their beloved president, Tilāhun Gizāw, who was mysteriously murdered on the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> of December the same year.

I fully attended the horrors of the December 29<sup>th</sup> which followed the assassination of Tilāhun on the 28<sup>th</sup>. By then Emperor Haile Selassie was

reportedly said to have been in Härär or Diré Dāwā, presumably following the development of the events by remote control.

The details of the events are still vivid in my memory. Today, whenever I move into *Sedest Kilo* Campus of the university and walk particularly in the triangle between the Arts Building (today's OCR), the OSSREA Headquarters (a later addition) and Kennedy Library (newly erected), the events of the 29<sup>th</sup> December always come to my memory. Sometimes, I say to myself, "I could have died at that time." Luckily, I did not. Accidentally, in one early morning of 2005, close to today's Social Science Building, I met one of the radical student activists at the time, the late Dr. Gäbru Märshā and posed him the following question: "*ezih gebi west men tiz yemileh yätufüsämä teleq dergit alle?*" Or "What big event do you remember that occurred on this campus?" I had expected that he would utter the events associated with the death of Tilāhun Gizāw, USUAA's president instantly. However, Gäbru could not come to my expectation. "What event?" He exclaimed. I was surprised and I thought I would soon give him a clue in order to save time: The moment I mentioned the word Tilāhun and other events, he again made other unexpected remarks: "*Yaneko tümāri lāy yitākusālu belen alāsābnem,*" meaning: "At that time we have never thought of them [government forces] shooting at students!"

Nevertheless, on my part, I have always had a dream of recording the events evoking my memory. In the last section, I would give an eyewitness account of the terrible events that occurred within the *Sedest Kilo* Campus of Addis Ababa University on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 1969. However, before I narrate the events, I would like to relate the general organizational and academic atmosphere of the university that enhanced students' interaction and rise to radicalism.

### **Education, Student Organization and Interaction at AAU**

Lab School students had the right to attend university students' gatherings and participate in assemblies and demonstrations. They had a good opportunity to interact with university students. This was a novel and passionate exposure to students like myself who had great admiration for university education and university students. They had wide opportunity to interact with university students. The fact that the Lab School was entirely situated within the *Sedest Kilo* university premises, enabled its students, like myself, to acquire a multidimensional development to a later university life and beyond. The impact of this interaction on the physical, social and above all, intellectual and

political maturity of the students, I believe, must have been immense. Moreover, the Lab School produced activists for the university student movement as we are going to see below.

Lab School students belonged to the Faculty of Education. Once they joined the university, the students had two options: join either the natural science stream in *Arāt Kilo* or the social science stream in *Sedest Kilo*. By then in terms of its staff combination, the Faculty of Education was not a self-sufficient faculty. Class-wise its students belonged either to the Faculty of Arts in *Sedest Kilo* or to the Faculty of Science in *Arāt Kilo*. In both streams courses were offered on major-minor combination basis, and supplemented by other education courses like pedagogy, psychology and other common courses. The staff of the Faculty of Education offered several courses related to pedagogy and psychology to education students. Apparently, they were numerically small.

University students' activities were organized at department and faculty level. Like any other student, the Lab School students, once they joined the university, had ample chance to participate in more than one students' association. For instance, one could at the same time become a member of the History Department Students Association and Arts Faculty Students Association or a member of the History Department Students Association and Faculty of Education Students Association. Each association used to collect membership fees from students. I belonged to the latter two associations. Moreover, all the university students were brought under one umbrella of a professional association, that is, the University Students Union of Addis Ababa, popularly known as USUAA. It was a newly emergent student body.

University students had other means of interaction associated with learning. Classroom learning was one while attending a multitude of public lectures and debates was another. Informal discussions used to take place principally in dormitories, cafeterias and recreation centers and, officially in student meetings. The public lectures and debates were organized by departments and faculties as well as by student associations or the Student Union (USUAA). Students had ample opportunity to attend and discuss certain issues, no matter whether it was politics or otherwise. In many student meetings the condition of the Ethiopian masses in terms of illiteracy, economic and social life and the exploiting nature of the feudo - monarchical system imposed on the broad masses were among the principal themes of discussion. "Education for All" and "Land to the Tiller" were among the principal slogans for which students

had been discussing and struggling to attain better living condition for the masses.

Students had also several other means of interaction linked with teaching and learning. For instance, in addition to the courses such as English, Amharic, history, geography, sociology, psychology, philosophy/logic, physical science, biological science, health science, mathematics, etc., many of which were offered as foundation courses for freshman or first year students. Some of the courses like history or geography and philosophy or logic were elective. There were also other inter - departmental course offerings after the completion of two semesters. Moreover, there were compulsory or elective courses which students from different faculties had to take jointly. For example, in the Department of History there were courses like **Political History** and **Modern World History** taken not only by history students (both Arts and Education) but also by other students from other faculties and departments like the Law School and Political Science and International Relations. The courses were offered by the staff of the Department of History to both history majors and non-history students. Besides, there were also elective courses which students had to take according to their inclination or interest. I remember I was the only student from my batch who had taken a course entitled **Social and Political Theory** which I learned with students of the Department of Political Science and International Relations. The instructor was Dr. Nigussie Ayele. There is no room to wholly explain how much I enjoyed the course and the class discussions generated though classes were often interrupted due to student radicalism.

The university had several other means of cultivating the academic potentiality of students such as writing précis or summary of chapters and/or books. A good instance is, Professor Tadesse Tamrat who made us read and submit a summary of *The Glorious Victories of Amdä Seyon* (a new publication) in a couple of pages. Such chapter summaries were also particularly true in education courses taught by Dr. Abayneh Worke, Dr. Teshome Wāgāw and Dr. Yosuf Omār Abdi. Moreover, university students were expected to write one or two term papers for each course. This was somewhat a universal academic exercise among students in the Social Sciences Stream. As a partial course requirement, the term paper work was a must submit assignment. Failure to do so would result not only in earning no grade but also, if not remedied, in eventual dismissal. I know a few dismissal cases in this respect and one of them was my classmate. On top of this, as I indicated, public

lectures organized by departments or student associations had their own bearing on the academic and social life of students.

Furthermore, there were Wednesday History Seminars organized by the Department of History in which a considerable number of university staff, researchers, interested professionals, invited guests as well as fourth year history major students participate. This does not mean that seminars were taking place every Wednesday, but whenever it was held it was on Wednesday evening. As far as I know, this was a unique academic forum characteristic of the History Department. The forum was not only an academic venue for the staff but also for fourth year history major students who were also expected to present a certain portion of their BA thesis for discussion. This was an opportune moment for history students to get experience of how to present papers in such a forum and, more importantly, to see the progress of their work and receive advice, comments and suggestions from the audience to develop their research work further. The department was responsible for typing and distributing the drafts to the participants.

Historic tour was another academic sphere where students had the opportunity to enhance the knowledge they acquired in class and by reading books. For instance, in my case, my classmates and I visited several historic places such as pre-Gondar sites (between Enfrāz and Gondar), Gorgorā, Gondar, Aksum, Yeha, Dābrā Dāmo, Mātārā, Mekele and Ankobār. I found the Gondar castles interesting, the construction and inside works of art of the Debra Berhan Selassie Church magnificent, and the Yeha Stone Temple building, the stelaes of Aksum and the Abreha-WaAtsbeha rock-hewn church wonderful. This was a unique occasion for me not only because it helped me to relate theory with practice but, it also enabled me to know a considerable portion of my country and the way of life of its people, for the betterment of whom the university students were struggling. During the tour we also enjoyed the rare reception and hospitality we had had at Enticho (by the owner of the Restaurant the Wubnāh family), Zālāmbāsā (by the town administration), Adigrāt (by the Head of the Catholic Cathedral) and Mekele (special breakfast served at Yohannes IV *Gebi* (palace) – *Leul Rās* Māngāshā Seyoum himself handing plates over to the members of the touring team). The *rās* and the late Dr. Richard Caulk, leader of the team, conversed in English in which the former raised some natural problems of his region. It seems that the *rās* was following our movements and well-being throughout Tegrāy.

Life among university students was not monotonous. In addition to being busy and inquisitive with their studies, students had the chance to expose themselves to various means of recreation and relaxation. One of them was attending music and dancing occasions. Several music bands of Addis Ababa - such as the *Kebur Zäbägnä* (Imperial Bodyguard), Police *Serawit* (Police Forces) and *Meder Tor* (Ground Forces) - organized by student associations or organizations - often entertained students playing their music and displaying their local dances at the University Christmas Hall, *Sedest Kilo*. I believe Tilahun Gesese, Mahmud Ahmed and Bezunash Bekele from *Kibur Zäbägnä*, Alemäyehu Eshete and Hirut Bekele from the Police *Serawit*, and Tāmīrāt Mollā, etc. from *Meder Tor* were among the prominent singers. It is not difficult to imagine how much such occasions were pleasant and welcomed by students. This must have also enhanced the frequency and amount of interaction among university students.

### **Education and Radicalism**

The History Department was one of the university academic units from which student leaders and activists emerged. Let me mention the top two activists of my time as student. One was Mäsfen Habtu and another Abreham Gebre-Egziabher. I do not know when Mäsfen joined the university. But I am certain that he was my senior though at one time we happened to be class - mates. I know Abreham well because we were the same batch in the Lab School. He came from Täfäri Mäkonnen School. We happened to be history classmates when we joined the university. Both Mäsfen and Abreham had become known USUAA activists of my time. Particularly, Mäsfen had become so outspoken that at one time he was elected secretary of USUAA, the ever- growing militant student association. Abreham was Addis Ababa - born from Eritrean parents, whereas I know little of Mäsfen's background except that he was rumored to have close relation with Abebe Rettā, a minister of the Imperial period.

At this juncture it would be appropriate to relate how much Mäsfen and Abreham were committed activists of the growing militant student body. As they used to say, that they had heavy engagement and assignment in USUAA underground works did not leave them sufficient time to attend class regularly. A history class in point was that of Dr. Sergew Häble-Selässie, instructor of ancient Ethiopian history. Dr. Sergew, one of the founding fathers of the History Department, was a conscientious instructor. His method of handling the class was somewhat meticulous. He used to take attendance every period.

This was usually followed by a short question and answer session which the instructor himself used to ask questions by calling students name from the attendance register. Dr. Sergew pretty well used to know who regularly attends his class and participates well or not in the instructor - led pre-lecture history class reiterations. It was not only this. The instructor used to make some remarks against our names in the register book. So, we were attentive.

However, the case of both Mäsfen and Abreham was different. There was a time when both students used to attend class irregularly. The instructor, Dr. Sergew must have known this well. The tempo of student radicalism was also rising more than any other time before. That Mäsfen and Abreham were known USUAA activists was also widely known. However, both Mäsfen and Abreham were known for their class absenteeism, whereas Dr. Sergew was pretty known for his regularity and strictness. At the same time the instructor appears to have been very much perplexed of the student movement. However, he never raised any point regarding the student movement but he used to advise us to attend class regularly. Many of us were attending class regularly but Mäsfen and Abreham did not. Many times they were fortunate if one of them attended class. If one of them could attend class, they would discuss the rest and prepare themselves for examination, as they often stated to some of us.

As already noted, Mäsfen and Abreham continued to attend class turn by turn. One day it was Mäsfen's turn to attend Dr. Sergew's class. However, the instructor had just taken attendance before Mäsfen showed up. As soon as learning started, somebody knocked at the door. As already noticed, our attention was diverted towards the door. This was also true of the instructor. The door was pushed from outside and Mäsfen protruded his head into the classroom while the rest of his body remained outside. The instructor and Mäsfen stood gazing at each other. Apparently, Mäsfen stood waiting for the instructor to let him in. Those of us who were seated inside were very much puzzled as to what would happen as Mäsfen continued standing holding the handle of the door. Next, relief came when the instructor, rolling his big eyes and shining his big head, uttered some positive words saying, "Masfen, I think it is your turn to attend my class today, come in." We could have burst in laughter if Dr. Sergew had not been the instructor. Nevertheless, it was a big relief that Mäsfen got in, took a seat and, of course, on Abreham's behalf and on his own, attended the rest of the session. Attending class by turn was also true in other similar courses, but most of the instructors appear to have been conscious of the prevailing socio – political situation.



To some of us who had close association with them, Mäsfen and Abreham used to tell us that at times they had sleepless nights because they were heavily engaged in USUAA's activities as well as its underground works. On many occasions, we were their sources of information regarding class assignments like writing term papers and their submission dates. We used to wonder of their commitment to the student body, that is, USUAA and definitely to the broad masses behind. How much they were determined was no doubt beyond imagination.

The History Department also contributed activists to the Eritrean liberation struggle. Mussie Tesfämikāel could be cited as a good example. I do not know when Mussie first joined the department. But I am sure he was a university student long before me. I learned from him that at one time he had abandoned the university and joined a liberation front in Eritrea. By then I had no knowledge of the liberation fighter. After some time, for reasons he declined to narrate, Mussie reiterated that he had abandoned the movement, got amnesty, and rejoined the same department. He lived off campus. This time we became classmates. He was closely attached to the activists of USUAA. In 1970/1971 academic year he happened to be one of the student activists who hijacked an Ethiopian aeroplane from Bahir Dar to Khartoum. I do not exactly know when he rejoined the Eritrean liberation front. Later, I heard Mussie and his group, labeled as members of the *Menka'e*, or splinter group, were reportedly condemned and, subsequently killed by the same front.

Following the assassination of Tilāhun Gizāw in late December 1969, Mäsfen and Abreham quit their university education and they appeared to have gone into hiding. And at one time it was rumored that the former had left for the USA where he joined the Ethiopian students' movement in North America. But, for reasons which I do not know, he was said to have committed suicide abroad. Where Abreham stayed after his escape from Ethiopia, and what he was doing afterwards is not also clear. But one thing is certain. At one time he had lived in Sweden where he died in 2013, I learned.

This and other similar occasions invite us to understand how much university education had enabled students such as Mäsfen and Abreham to be so dedicated to carry out USUAA assignments to the extent of not allowing themselves attend class regularly. They could be considered as a good example of the many other university students of their times, who are either alive or had fallen, had been committed for the national cause they stood for.

Education and radicalism had also other means to express and rebuke reaction among students. Through its activists, USUAA was used to prepare agenda for discussion by the student body. The forum was instructive in the sense students had the chance to learn the use of new concepts like motion, seconded or not, amendment, support or not, abstain, and majority or minority vote, etc. However, it must be underlined that whenever the student leadership held discussions and debates, the room for entertaining divergent ideas and views other than that of USUAA was limited. Those students who either opposed or did not respect decisions passed by the student body would be liable sometimes to threats and attacks or they would at least be labelled as 'saboteurs'. Though one of the major cries of the student struggle was for democracy, its application and practice among the general student body was somewhat guarded. Moreover, there were also times when the student leaders had to win the support of outspoken students to their side so as to strengthen the role USUAA was playing. A particular instance in this respect was Gäbru Märshā, the same activist I mentioned earlier. He was one of those students who had returned from the American Field Service and he was vocal. But he was advocating for campus union and not for all wide university union. He had support from returnees of the Field Service as well as several others. What is surprising is, after a while USUAA activists won Gäbru to their side and afterwards he became an ardent supporter of the all - wide university union. But one thing must be clear. To my knowledge, all such measures were acceptable in the sense that they were necessary to suppress divergent ideas in favor of keeping the student body in unity and in making students have a common stance in the whole national struggle of USUAA whose motto was to bring social justice and betterment in the living condition of the masses by overthrowing the imperial regime. But there is no doubt that in its struggle against the feudo - monarchical system, USUAA had won not only the support of the university student body but it had also penetrated among high school students in and outside Addis Ababa who now and then showed solidarity with the university students in various occasions.

There was also another program that enabled university students disseminate their ideas of change among the wider community. This was the Ethiopian University Service (EUS). It was a one year national service rendered by all university students in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations. This was a good opportunity for students not only to know their people, their culture and the state of living they were in, but also to make new ideas of change infiltrate among high school students, employees in offices, workers in factories and the wider environment. In short, the EUS was not

only a means of giving service to the nation but it was also a good means of propagating the principles and objectives of the student movement against the imperial regime. Many students paid sacrifice in various capacities.

Fighting against illiteracy was one of the slogans of the student movement. This also included upgrading those who had already reached a certain level of education in reading and writing, general principles of mathematics as well as other fields related to community service. Participation in literacy campaign was a widespread activity of USUAA in which many university students were engaged in teaching in evening classes voluntarily. On return AAU provided bus service.

There were also times when the Addis Ababa University students, led by USUAA, stood for justice at the global level. A case in point was that of British Rhodesia or today's Zimbabwe. In opposition to the Ian Smith - led Unilateral Declaration of Independence of white minority rule in Rhodesia from Britain, students held a big demonstration parading along the streets of Addis Ababa, marching from Sedest *Kilo* Campus, via *Arāt Kilo* – Piazza – Churchill Avenue and Mexico Square to the Headquarters of the OAU, today's African Union (AU). This was very colorful in the sense students not only stood for a noble cause and expressed their solidarity with the people of Rhodesia, but, I would say, it was a momentous time when students found themselves felt by the Addis Ababans more than any other time before. Strangely enough, parades up to the AU were accompanied by Police Forces, sparsely distributed on right and left of the demonstrators, and General Yilma Shibashi, the Addis Ababa Police Commissioner, running here and there in his white Mercedes police car. At the OAU compound now – AU headquarters, Mr. Diallo Tele, the Executive Secretary gave a speech in French which somebody translated it for us in English. Finally, the secretary appreciated and thanked the university students for their genuine cause.

Next, the same student demonstration continued to the British Embassy, near Qäbännä River. But here the situation and its consequences were different. We found the gate of the embassy well-guarded by the Ethiopian Police with Mac trucks and Fire Brigade squad. After some discussions and negotiation between the ambassador and the student leadership, the former, standing from within the embassy premises, appeared to the demonstrators. But as soon as he started delivering a speech, a university scholarship student from Tanzania, if I am not mistaken, a certain Othello threw a stone from which the ambassador narrowly escaped. Immediately, the Police Forces took action on students

beating us with clubs and showering us with water cannon, and we were forced to disperse in various directions. It was late afternoon when we reached *Arāt Kilo* and *Sedest Kilo* university campuses where we managed to satisfy ourselves in the cafeteria. This was one of the big occasions when students showed greater solidarity among themselves on behalf of African brothers.

### **Students' Movement: Aspiration and Frustration of Tilāhun Gizāw**

In 1968 elections for USUAA presidency took place. Tilāhun Gizāw and Mäkonnen Bishāw competed for the office of presidency. The former belonged to the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of Arts while the latter came from the School of Social Work, then an autonomous faculty. It was believed that Tilāhun had the support of the majority though there were many others who were advocating for Mäkonnen. The former was considered “revolutionary” while the latter was regarded as “reactionary” or at most “reformist”. Some students identified Mäkonnen as “moderate” and, hence, they used to advocate that he would be a better choice for student presidency in the sense that he would be more agreeable to the status quo. Tilāhun had been regarded as an ardent critic of the prevailing socio-political system, who, some argued, would invite unnecessary collision with the imperial government.

Nevertheless, both candidates made their election speeches not only in the Christmas Hall but also in Room 405 (today's 432), Arts Faculty Building and other adjacent rooms as well as in the Student Cafeteria of the Faculty of Science in *Arāt Kilo*. The medium of communication was English. Mäkonnen was more eloquent than Tilāhun and he was careful not to antagonize himself with the then political system, whereas Tilāhun was an outspoken critic of the government, hence, stood condemning the political system openly. He was trying to analyze the political system from the Marxist point of view, which at times, his analysis was less comprehensible to many students. Yet, Tilāhun was more popular than Mäkonnen. So, there was high expectation that Tilāhun would win the election. However, during the last few days before election, things began to take a different turn. The supporters of Mäkonnen were so organized that they went on propagating: “How Tilāhun, a Tigrigna speaker, could become a leader of the student body!” They advocated for Mäkonnen, going from one dormitory to the other. They spread such adverse ethnic and regional elements into the student body and urged students that they should elect an Amharic speaker to preside over USUAA, the student body. In the final analysis, Mäkonnen narrowly won the election and was soon

inaugurated as the president of USUAA. Surprisingly, ethnicity or regionalism prevailed over modern university education, the prime basis for radicalism and change. The student body accepted the results. But I think it was difficult for Tilāhun to swallow the pill though he had given recognition to the results of the election. It was soon rumored that Tilāhun had withdrawn from the university in order to make better preparation for next year's election. This happened to be true.

### **USUAA Election, Tilahun Gizaw's Assassination and Its Immediate Aftermath**

The student activists did not lose hope. It was again rumored that Tilāhun had returned to university life with better preparation. Why Tilāhun was that much adamant for the office of the president is not clear. Nevertheless, as can be gathered from various occasions, there seems to have been a commitment on the part of the revolutionaries such as Tilahun to bring change in the feudo-monarchical system which was considered as the hub of backwardness, exploitation and oppression of the broad masses. In 1968 - 1969 Tilāhun appeared as a candidate for USUAA presidency. In one of his election speeches, he again tried to condemn the imperial regime. For instance, I remember when he uttered slogans such as "the ramshackled government of Haile Selassie" and "down with Haile Selassie's government" openly, but within the university campus. At times, he used to give a Marxist analysis of the social and economic impact of the relations between the production forces and production relations, taking the Ethiopian society into consideration. However, as already noted earlier, some of what he had been saying appear to have been less comprehensible to the ordinary members of the student body. Yet, Tilāhun was liked by many students and whatever it was, his analysis of Marxist literature, was applauded by many students. Moreover, what he had said would also be a topic of discussion among students in dormitories. Whether the thinking of Tilāhun and other activists was understood or not, as students, we had one thing in common. Many students had considered themselves as harbingers of change, freedom and development to the broad masses by lifting the yoke of feudo-bougeois system imposed upon them for centuries, and this was believed to have been represented by Emperor Haile Selassie. To this effect, Tilahun's speeches were very much applauded by the student body. This can be measured by the mere fact that he easily won the 1968-1969 election. Next, he was inaugurated president of USUAA, the University Students Union of Addis Ababa.

1969 was full of remarkable events that revealed the stand and support of USUAA, on one hand, and government's reaction and its brutal action on students, on the other. Certain themes of concern appear to have brought the contradiction between students and the imperial Ethiopian government much more to the open. The Eritrean question of secession was one. USUAA leadership was very careful in handling the issue. The whole objective of the student movement was to keep the mass of students in unity and align them in their struggle against the imperial regime. At the same time, the government considered the student movement in general and its leaders in particular as a potential threat to weaken or overthrow the regime.

Another major feature of the 1969 student activities was the question of Ethiopian nationalities. Again, analyzing Marxist literature, Wālelign Mäkonnen, a student of the Department of Political Science and International Relations from *Sedest Kilo* Campus, tried to demonstrate that Ethiopia is composed of several nationalities and it is not as such a 'nation' state. The study condemned the Amhara-Tigrean domination of the political system. The analysis was not only accepted by USUAA leadership, but also appeared in the students' organ, the **Struggle**. Moreover, the student body was becoming more and more aggressive against the government in its publications like the **Struggle** and other clandestine literature. Leaflets were now and then appearing on the ground from both sides – students versus government. Particularly, during Tilāhun's presidency, tension increasingly grew and the government mass media went on assaulting and defaming the student body and its activities characterizing the student movement as anti-government and anti-national unity.

The government began to take severe action against the student movement. By then I was a 2nd year student residing in Men's Hostel of Addis Ababa University. This was an off-campus student hostel between *Afincho Ber* and Menen Girls School, west of the asphalt road that runs northwards from *Afincho Ber*. Having dinner in Christmas Hall, I went to my dormitory with a couple of other dorm-mates. As soon as we started studying, somebody came from outside and said, "*Tilāhun betyet tūmeteto Afincho Ber lay wādqāwāl*" or "Tilāhun has been shot and fallen at *Afincho Ber*." He proceeded to another room to tell the same. We ran to *Afincho Ber*, approximately not more than 300 or 400 meters away from the hostel. By the time we reached there, there was no body in the locality except some young adults standing. They told us that some people had taken somebody in a car towards Haile Selassie I Hospital (today's *Yekātīt 12* Hospital), about a kilometer away from *Afincho*

*Ber.* We hastened to the hospital. This time we were joined by several other students. That somebody was admitted in a car was confirmed but hospital guards denied us from entering the hospital. Meanwhile, a student came from inside and informed us that Tilāhun was under operation. And he did not hide that the case was serious. Subsequently, students continued flocking to the hospital from *Arat Kilo* and *Sedest Kilo* university campuses. A big number of students gathered all around the Martyrs' Monument, in front of the hospital. The gathering swelled larger and larger. Students filled the *Sedest Kilo* Square including the lawn around the monument. In the meantime, a couple of Volkswagen cars, shrilling sirens, moved into the hospital. We guessed they could be doctors perhaps summoned for assistance.

Late evening news came that Tihahun had passed away. We grieved and sighed at the event. We did not know what to do; we remained standing there as if waiting for something to happen and it happened. Students broke into the hospital and came out with the body of Tilahun. The body, followed by a big number of students, was taken to *Sedest Kilo* Campus and put on the floor of the veranda of the Arts Building. Several students were crying, some yelling: “*guādé, guādé! Tilāhun guādé!*”, that is, equivalent to: “Comrade Tilahun and Comrade Tilahun! or “Tilāhun, the Comrade”. Some others used to stand and chant various slogans like: “*Endä Ho Chi Mini, endä Che Guevera, fānno tāsāmārā!*” It is like saying, “Let’s rebel and fight like Ho Chi Mini, and like Che Guevara!” Some others stood and chanted: “*tāgāy bimot, tegel aymotem!*” or “A revolutionary (a fighter) may die, but not the (revolution) struggle!” Still some others continued to incite students’ militancy, shouting other slogans like: “*Gobäz, chākā mägbāt aläben! Yehenen müngest mütāl aläben,*” that is, roughly to say: “Courage listeners! We should enter the forest and make this government crumble!” At times the same chanting or slogans and other similar ones would be reiterated or continued. I also remember some others who were close associates of Tilāhun who were screaming and weeping as well as at the same time agitating other students to intensify their struggle against Haile Selassie’s regime.

The night weather was very bitter and yet we tried to bear the severity of the December cold. Some students stood and moved here and there to fight the cold. Others sat down. Some others remained seated. It was a tiresome and sleepless night. Somehow it dawned. Some students went to their dormitories and several others went to the cafeteria for breakfast. Afterwards, students continued massing from several directions. Early morning a big number of high school students joined the university students. The field in front of the

Arts Building was literally filled with hundreds of students, that is, male and female. It appeared as if there was no space left empty. By then there was no Social Science Building. It was just an open field.

However, it was not only students who were pouring into *Sedest Kilo* Campus of the university. Off-campus, right and left of the main gate, extending towards the Lab School and the University Registrar all along *Sedest Kilo*, going northwards to the place where a bank stands today, the Police Forces, in uniform and armed with helmets and guns were readily visible from inside the university. This was not all. After a while we saw the Imperial Bodyguard entering the *Sedest Kilo* University campus via the main gate in front of which was the Headquarters of the Imperial Bodyguard (today's Federal Ministry of Planning). They were in uniform and armed with guns. How they were marching inwards along the asphalt road leading to the so-called Swimming Pool, was strange to us. We were observing their movements from far. Their motion was very slow; they used to march and stand; at times they were standing more than they moved. They walked around the Pool and in front of the Headquarters of the University. It was already afternoon when they turned left and moved straight along the asphalt road leading towards the St. Mark Church. By then we guessed that they were surrounding the dense student gathering assembled in front of the Arts Building. When we looked outside through the fences behind the Arts Building, the Police Forces were still amassing in uniforms, wearing helmets and holding firearms. To my knowledge, this was perhaps the only time when armed military forces entered the university campus to cow students. Furthermore, this action caused outrage on the part of the students who opposed military presence inside the campus. It seemed as if there was no university administration.

The Arts Building was the focal point of activity. Several students stood in melancholia around the body of Tilāhun. Student activists now and then appeared from one of the floors of the building and announced the development of events from time to time through a megaphone. At times they used to condemn the imperial government and its machinery. They now and then not only tried to ridicule the government forces but also provoked them to fire, shoot and even kill students, reciting: "***Ye'Tilāhun gādāyoch; egnānem gedelun! Chersun! Tekusu! Esti bel tekus! Fascist!!***" This is to say: "The killers of Tilāhun! Kill us also! Finish us! Fire, fire! (You) fascist." Another student activist would appear and try to challenge the government forces reiterating these and uttering other similar provocative statements.



Next, negotiations on how the body of Tilāhun would be moved to the burial ground became a point of contention. At times the student activists were announcing that they were negotiating with government agents on how and where to bury the body of Tilāhun, still lying on the floor of the veranda of the Arts Building. There were times when we hoped they would reach an agreement and bury the body of Tilāhun with students following in parade. Meanwhile, the student activists announced that the government wanted to take the body to the residence of Princess Sārā Gizāw (Tilāhun's sister and widow of Prince Mäkonnen Haile Selassie). But this did not happen because student leaders and activists opposed the idea. This was communicated to students through the megaphone.

There were also times when the activists now and then appeared with their megaphone and tried to provoke the military forces to shoot and kill students. The point was to ridicule the government forces who were believed to have stood for the imperial regime. The point for which the students had been struggling was to bury the body of Tilāhun themselves, whereas the government negotiators were adamant to this as stated by the student activists. It was again announced that an agreement was reached to bury Tilāhun's body on condition that the body would be parading in front and the students following from behind. The student activists announced that they refused. Instead, they insisted that the body should be placed in between, some students in front and others following. This was communicated to the students again through the megaphone from one of the floors of the Arts Building, and at the same time encouraging students not to disperse but to remain united and not to leave the student leadership alone. The situation grew tense. We did not know what would happen next. We started pitying the student leaders and the activists, if something worse happened. What we feared most occurred soon.

As already indicated, negotiation on how the body of Tilāhun would be moved to the burial ground was the current central issue of contradiction between government forces and the student body. But negotiations soon failed; deadlock reached, and the situation grew more and more tense. This time government agents appeared to intervene using a megaphone from the ground. They announced the following: *ahun māwtāt yechālāl; yäfülägāchehu māwtāt techilālāchehu!* This is to say: "It is now possible to go out if you want!" Some students went out but many of us could not leave the student activists who announced through their own megaphone to remain firm in our stand and not to leave them alone. After a while another announcement came from the government agents, saying: "*Ke'ahun jāmro māwtātem honä*

***mügbät ayfäqüdem!***” It roughly means, “From now on, it is not allowed either to go out or to get in!” By this time, we anticipated danger would come. One of my friends went out while two of us remained respecting the call of students. By then, the Bodyguard troops, who had been in a very slow march from early morning on, had finally reached the veranda of the Arts Building on the floor of which the body of Tilāhun Gizāw was lying. It was early afternoon. As soon as they reached the verandah where Tilahun’s body was believed to have been lying, they started firing; they continued to smash the windows of the Arts Building; they fired over the huge student crowd; overhead gun firing continued without stop! On the part of students ***“teleq teremes täfütärä; tätāramäsen; wädēt endūmeneshūsh gerā gābān!*** This is roughly equivalent to saying: “A big confusion was created; we were bewildered; we did not know what to do and where to go!” *Sedest Kilo* Campus appeared as if it was a battleground, of course firing being mastered by one side, the military. It was worst on female students. Some were falling as they ran for safety and standing up and running again. Everybody ran to escape death. Everybody used his instinct and dispersed in all possible directions of escape except the eastern one which was the most unsafe because heavy concentration of troops was visible from inside the campus.

With my friend and many others we fled towards the St. Mark Church. We rolled over the fence that used to separate the asphalt road from the direction of the field where we have been standing for over half a day. When we reached the university football field, we encountered a small group of armed police troops. To my knowledge this was the only police group available within the university campus. We rushed forward and some police constables chased us with overhead gun fire from the rear. While crossing the field, we met some instructors in flight; to this day, I remember the late Dr. Haile Wolde Mikāel, holding his sweaters, following us from the back. Overhead firing continued all along the way via the Law School premises and some of our former classrooms in the good days of the Lab School. When we reached the university gate via the Registrar, we confronted with the second group of police constables who attacked us with tear gas and overhead gun shots from just outside the gate. We had no other choice; we desperately scuttled through the policemen and crossed the asphalt road that comes from *Afincho Ber* from the west and *Sedest Kilo* from the east.

Surprisingly, the Addis Ababa residents, living off – campus, who might have been alerted because of the heavy roars of gun - fire inside the university, and perhaps following the development of events from far, provided us with pails

of water and wet towels and other pieces of cloth to rub our faces from the terrible gas contamination our eyes were burning from. They helped us to get relief from the heavy and terrible tear gas smokes that we faced at the gate. Some residents even provided us with food and drinks afterwards. By then we realized that we were in the midst of the people who understood us and perhaps the genuine cause of the student movement for justice and equality. We dispersed and joined the town population.

In the evening it was announced on the radio that four other students were killed and parents and relatives were advised to take the bodies. Their names were listed. I remember Sebhatu Webnäh (from Enticho) and a certain Jämäl (from Härar, I suppose!) to this day. My memory fails me to remember the other two. It appears that the body of Tilāhun was finally taken by a Bodyguard unit, who were the master- mind of the in- campus operation, and not the Police Forces, as one may think so. I do not have any idea where the body of Tilāhun Gizāw was finally buried. Rumor had it that the body was buried in the Monastery of Dābrā Libānos or taken to Māichāw, his home town. Other than the government mass media, no exact figure was provided on the number of students killed or hurt. Officially, we lost five students, including Tilāhun, the president of the student body, USUAA. Student activists put the number of students killed much higher. I have no doubt many more could have at least been wounded or hurt.

The *Sedest Kilo* campus of the university was closed for renovation. Only the student cafeteria in *Arāt Kilo* Campus was used to give service. The student body, USUAA was banned and some student leaders were placed in detention. Students insisted that those arrested should be released. After about a month the *Sedest Kilo* university campus was re-opened and much later those who had been arrested were also released. Yet, USUAA did not relinquish from its struggle. Instead, it continued issuing underground publications against the government. During the subsequent years of my stay in the university (1970-1972), the student movement was growing more militant despite government repression and anti – student movement propaganda. This is not surprising because students had already considered themselves as the harbingers of economic and socio-political change in the country.

