TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE ATTAINMENT OF INDEPENDENCE OF INDIA INFLUENCE THE GROWTH OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM?

India which was the biggest British Colony in the World became a British protectorate in 1857. It was a major source of raw materials and market for the British goods. Like in Africa, the British rule in India was aggressive, exploitative and inhuman. Because India wasn’t by then very strong militarily, it adopted a peaceful approach in the struggle for independence under its leader Mahatma Ghandi. Basing on this peaceful means (Ghandism) and sometimes violent means, India was able to get its independence in 1947. To a greater extent therefore, the attainment of independence by India in 1947 influenced the growth of African nationalism in the following ways:-

India encouraged African nationalists to use a strategy called Ghandism or non-violent means in pursuit of their goal for independence. Gandhi’s strategy of non-confrontation was adopted by many nationalist leaders. This involved the use of peaceful demonstrations, riots, boycotts, sit down strikes, petitions and the use of meetings. Through this method, Nyerere was able to win independence for his country in 1961.

Another follower of Ghandism was Kenneth Kaunda. As a staunch Catholic, he embraced Gandhi’s method of peaceful resistance to fight for Zambia’s independence. However the path to Zambia’s independence became violent in 1964 when peaceful approach failed. In the same year Zambia was granted its independence.

The attainment of independence of India was a source of inspiration to the African nationalists. India inspired the African nationalists to form political parties to promote the struggle against colonial rule. Nationalists were inspired by the Indian National Congress, the political party which catapulted India to independence. They adopted its ideological philosophy as well as its methods of work. Through this, they were able to create their own political parties which led their countries to independence.

Indian delegates to the UNO condemned colonialism and also the pressurized the United Nations members to press for the independence of African states. India represented the voiceless African in UNO. It used the UNO General Assembly to attack colonial rule in Africa. It rallied other Asian countries like China, Indonesia that joined later to place considerable pressure on Britain and France to de-colonize. This forced the UN trustee ship council to quicken the de-colonization of Tanganyika, Italian Somali land, Namibia and Cameroon.

Through their leader Nehru, India imposed restrictions on public shows, cinemas and films which portrayed the Africans as inferior people. It should be recalled that it was a common practice by the whites to depict the black race as inferior, backward and uncouth. India stood up against this and elevated the image and prestige of the Africans.

India gave scholarships to African students which helped to turn them into nationalists. India opened the doors of its institutions of higher learning to the African nationalists. In Uganda national leaders like Abu Mayanja, Kintu Musoke and Bidandi Ssali were the beneficiaries of Indian scholarships. Through this they were able to acquire skills and ideas which enabled them to participate meaningfully in the affairs of their countries.

India provided significant moral, financial and legal support to the liberation movements and struggles in Africa. It aided MPLA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique, TANU in Tanganyika, CPP in Ghana, NCNC in Nigeria such support from India significantly enabled African countries to get independence early enough.

India requested Britain to surrender its control over the African states. It used her influence in the Commonwealth to call for independence in British colonies like Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika and Ghana. Nehru Indian leader de-campaigned racial segregation in the Commonwealth states. Despite the sympathy India had towards Britain it was not willing to declare allegiance to Queen of England. India used the commonwealth to de-campaign colonial rule in Africa especially the British colonies hence quickening the pace decolonization in Africa.

India equally exploited her membership to the Non Aligned Movement to champion the cause of African struggle for independence. The NAM was formed in 1955 following the Bandung conference in Indonesia. One of the reasons for the formation of this body was to liberate African countries from the yoke of colonialism. NAM provided India with the forum to decampaigm colonialism

India sold to the African nationalists Mahatma Ghandi’s policy of using Christianity as a tool against exploitation. Many African nationalists adopted the Mahatma Gandhi’s Christian ideology of preaching against colonialism. In the struggle for independence in India Gandhi preached from the Bible. He encouraged equality, liberty. This was adopted by Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Nelson Mandela, Albert Luthuli and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa in de-campaigning colonial rule up to when South Africa got independence in 1994.

India militarized African nationalism in the struggle against colonialism. In 1962, Nehru took a bold move and applied violence to remove the last group of Portuguese imperialists from the Indian province of Goa. Many African revolutionary leaders later took up the advice from Nehru to use violence as a strategy of evicting the colonialists from the African soil. The militarization of African nationalism quickened the pace of decolonization.

India provided political guidance to the African nationalists. It advised and encouraged the African nationalists and African tribes to unite together against the colonialists. Unity among the people (masses) of Africa and the African nationalists was paramount if the African people were to acquire their independence. It was this unity which assisted the Africans to successfully fight for their independence.

The Green Pamphlet produced by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian Nationalism did much to inspire national sentiments in Africa. It was a forum for decampaigning colonial rule, it incorporated revolutionary literature of African revolutionary leaders like Eduardo Mondlane and Samora Machel on the correct strategies to be applied inorder to uproot colonial rule from Africa. This inspired and emboldened African nationalists.

India shook the foundation of the British Empire. Through its activities India helped to reduce the myth of the invincibility of the Whiteman. This made the Africans less afraid of the whites and therefore more determined to wrestle the whites out of Africa.

Despite the great role played by India to the growth of African nationalism, there were also other factors which to a lesser extent assisted Africa to win its independence. These among others included the following:-

*Mention and explain these factors chronologically as indicated below:-*

* European colonial policies in Africa.
* The rise of the independent churches
* The independence of African states of Liberia and Ethiopia
* The Pan African Movement since 1900
* The impact of the First World War of 1914 – 18
* The 1917 Russian revolution
* The 1935 – 41 Italo – Ethiopian crisis
* The outbreak of the Second World War.
* The signing of the Atlantic Charter of 1941
* The eventual liberation of Ethiopia in 1941
* The 1944 Brazzaville Conference
* The victory of the Labor Party in Britain in 1945
* The formation of the United Nations Organization in 1945
* The convening of the Manchester Conference in 1945
* The emergence of the super powers (Cold War politics in 1946)
* Urbanization in Africa since 1946
* The victory of the Nationalists Party in South Africa in 1948 and the subsequent enactment of the apartheid laws.
* The role of African elites
* The formation of mass political parties
* The contribution of the mass media
* The victory of the communist party in China in 1949
* The independence of Indonesia in 1950
* The Egyptian revolution of 1952
* The Mau Mau rebellion of 1952-56
* The defeat of the French in the Vietnamese war of independence in 1954
* The Algerian war of independence in 1954-62
* The Bandung Conference of 1955
* The independence of Ghana in 1957
* The independence of the French Guinea in 1958
* The role of the Commonwealth since 1959
* The Macmillan’s wind of change speech in 1960
* The formation of the OAU in 1963
* The Lisbon Coup of 1964.

As can be seen from the above argument, the attainment of India’s independence greatly provided the momentum which galvanized the spirit of nationalism in Africa. It must however not be forgotten that other factors too were at play though to a much lesser extent.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE *OAU* TO THE GROWTH OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM

The organization of African Unity was born on 25th May 1963 by 31 independent African states which assembled in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. It was eventually transformed into African Union in 2001. The O.A.U was a product of the compromise between the Casablanca Block composed of the radical group of Algeria, Egypt, Ghana and the Monrovia Group of moderates consisting of Ivory Coast, Nigeria and others. These groups had earlier disagreed on the proposal by Nkrumah to form a United States of Africa (the U.S.A).

One of the major reasons of the signing of the *OAU* Charter *on* the May 23, 1963 was the complete eradication of foreign influence and domination from the continent. Member-states established a liberation committee to help in during this noble cause where they agreed to work together to help African states and people still under foreign domination. The OAU played a fundamental role in the growth of African nationalism as discussed below.

The organization called for unity of Africans in their struggle against foreign domination. The OAU called upon African nationalists to involve masses in the anti-colonial struggles as a way to popularize the desire for independence.

Consequently, member-states of the OAU agreed to use their good offices to unite the liberation movements as a way to strengthen the effectiveness of the struggle. This was witnessed when the ZANU and the ZAPU agreed to work together to defeat the UDI.

The body established a liberation committee with its headquarters in Tanzania. The committee consisted of Algeria, Ethiopia, Guinea Conakry, Uganda, Egypt, Senegal, Zaire, Nigeria and Tanzania. The committee was responsible for coordinating the assistance from *African states and managing the* special fund. The committee extended moral, financial and military support to the liberation movements especially *of* Southern Africa.

Members of the OAU agreed to receive and sponsor nationalists from liberation movements for military, education and vocation training. They also allowed the transit of all materials (material aid) and volunteers on their way to liberated zones and to African states struggling for independence.

The Organisation of African Unity called upon the *UN* to impose sanctions against the Portuguese colonial oppressors in Africa, the apartheid regime in South Africa and Ian Smith's government in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) for their continued violation of African rights.

Consequently, members of the OAU addressed the African cause for complete independence in the UN general assembly. The body sent an African delegation consisting of foreign ministers of Liberia, Tunisia, Madagascar and Sierra Leone to speak at the meetings of the UN Security Council *(UNSC)* addressing the issue of genocide (mass killing) in Portuguese colonies. This attracted international attention against the atrocities of Portuguese colonialist in Africa.

The *OAU* demanded all African states to break *off* diplomatic and consular relations with the governments of Portugal and South Africa because of their continued oppression and humiliation of their African subjects. Members of the *OAU* agreed to cut off trade ties and boycott imports from these two countries and to close African ports and airports *to* Portuguese and South African ships and planes. They also restricted their planes from flying over African states.

Member-states of the OAU declared May 25, as *'African Liberation Day.'* On this day of every year, African states agreed to organize popular demonstrations, and raise awareness *for* complete eradication of colonial oppression from African states still under foreign domination.

Members *of the* OAU recognized possibilities of employment to refugees and political leaders from African states that were still under foreign domination. They agreed that if these political refugees were employed in African government services of independent states, they would *be* motivated to increasingly demand for their self-governance.

The OAU condemned racial discrimination in all its forms in Africa and all over the world. This led to the growth of African nationalism in a way that members of the OAU expressed deep concern aroused in all African peoples and governments. In particular, the OAU demanded an end to discrimination against people of African descent (origin) living outside Africa particularly the USA. This motivated Africans outside the continent to give assistance to the cause of African independence.

The Oganisation *of* African Unity emphasized resolution 1515 *of* the UN and this had an impact of the growth of African nationalism. Members of the OAU encouraged pressure on the colonial masters especially Britain to observe the provision of the UN resolution 1515 on independence and opposed her for looking on as the minority whites declared themselves independent *in* southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) through the UDI.

*The* continental body demanded for the immediate independence of Namibia away from *the* influence of apartheid in South Africa. The OAU emphasized that South West Africa (Namibia) was under the UN mandate (supervision) and therefore Africans in Namibia were entitled to self-determination. This moral support from the *OAU* increased the spirit of Namibians to *use* military means in their struggle for independence.

The OAU advocated for the respect of the resolutions of the 1941 Atlantic charter and this greatly influenced the growth of African nationalism. Members of the OAU called upon colonial masters to give the colonial people in Africa an opportunity to claim for their sovereign equality and independence without foreign domination.

Consequently, the OAU demanded for the observation and respect for the rights of Africans *on* the African continent as stated in the 1948 universal declaration of human rights, which included freedom of press, association and the right to equal representation in the legislative council.

The continental body recognized and approved liberation movements in Africa and this motivated African nationalism. The movements approved *by* the OAU included the FRELIMO of Mozambique, *the* ANC of South Africa, MPLA of Angola and the SWAPO of Namibia. The OAU supported them to use military means in their struggle for independence.

The OAU participated in pre-independence discussions *between* African nationalists and colonial administrators and this paved way for independence. Such discussions were organized between the ZANU and the ZAPU with Ian *Smith's* government of Southern Rhodesia, the ANC under Mandela and the apartheid regime of South Africa etcetera. The discussions were directed towards African freedom and independence from foreign domination.

Consequently, the organisation condemned the persecution of African liberation fighters through arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, hard labour, public flogging, among others. The *OAU* on this ground pressurized for the release of African politicians such as Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Robert Mugabe of Southern Rhodesia.

The Organization of African unity sent observers to witness independent transition (elections), which contributed to African attainment of independence. Observers were sent to Southern Rhodesia in 1980 where the ZANU led by Mugabe were victorious, to South Africa in 1994 where Mandela and the ANC won the race.

THE ITALIAN INVASION OF ETHIOPIA

(THE ITALO-ETHIOPIA CRISIS OF 1935 TO 1941)

THE CAUSES OF THE CRISIS (INVASION)

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia (The Second Italo-Ethiopian War), also referred to as the Second Italo-Abyssinian War, was a [colonial war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_war) that started in October 1935 and ended in May 1936. The war was fought between the armed forces of the [Kingdom of Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Italy) and the armed forces of the [Ethiopian Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_Empire) (also known at the time as [Abyssinia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia)). The war resulted in the [military occupation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_occupation) of Ethiopia from 1935 up to 1941.

This devastating conflict took place at a time Italy was under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, who had assumed power in Italy in 1922 while Ethiopia was on the other hand under Emperor Haile Selassie, who had ascended to power in 1913. The spark for the Italo-Ethiopian crisis was ignited by the following:-

The desire by Italy to revenge the Italian defeat at the battle of Adowa of 1896 by Ethiopia then under Emperor Menelik II led to the crisis. In that year, (1896) Italy was defeated by the Ethiopian troops. This was one of the biggest military humiliations that Italy had ever suffered moreover in the hands of an African country. Italy lost prestige and was regarded as a weakling in the eyes of other European powers. When Mussolini became the leader of Italy in 1922, he developed a burning desire to avenge this humiliation. He took advantage of the internal reorganisation in Italy and made his troops ready to invade Ethiopia in order to revenge the Italian defeat of 1896.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 war sparked off by Italy’s need to revive its imperial interests and to recover its lost international glory. Italy had suffered immensely when it was conquered and ruled by Napoleon during the Napoleonic period. The Austrians at one point in history equally ruled Italy. During the colonial period, Italy did not feature prominently as a colonial power. All these had debilitating effects on the image, position and status of Italy in world affairs. By attacking Ethiopia in 1935, Mussolini was attempting to redeem its image as a way of regaining its lost past glory.

The Italian desire to control the sea ports of Massawa and Assab led to the invasion of Ethiopia. These ports were strategically located and served as the gateway to the horn of Africa. It was through these ports that Ethiopia imported and exported its commodities. Italy wanted to take over these ports so that it could control the trade conducted through these ports.

The desire to construct a railway line to join the two Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland led to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. By constructing the line, Italy thought that she would be strengthening its presence on the ground. Besides, the railway line would make it easy for Italy to extend its imperial rule beyond Eritrea and Somaliland.

The ideology of fascism that developed in Italy in the 1920’s was also responsible for the war between Italy and Ethiopia. Fascism is an ideology which uses violence in order to attain political objectives. Fascism also believes in discrimination and domination of the weaker race by a stronger one. The proponents of Fascism are called Fascists. Initially, the fascists had an axe as their political symbol. The Fascists had five commandments one of which stated that *‘Peace is equal to violence’*. This kind of fascist thinking compelled Italy to invade Ethiopia which was already its perceived traditional enemy.

The invasion also took place because Italy wanted to demonstrate its military strength. Over the years, Italy had undergone massive industrialisation. A huge military arsenal had piled up and much investment had been done in the military sector yet Italy for many years Italy had not tested its military strength. Mussolini thus looked at this as a good opportunity to test Italy’s military strength.

Another cause of this conflict was that Italy claimed that it had a mission to export civilization and to spread Christianity in Ethiopia. It should however be recalled that Ethiopia was the first African country to get Christianity. According to available historical records, Ethiopia was the first Black Country to get Christianity. It also had its own missionaries that preached Christianity to the world. It didn’t therefore make sense for Italy to attack Ethiopia in the name of spreading Christianity. Even if Christianity did not exist in Ethiopia, it was unwise for Italy to use violence in order to spread it. This means therefore that there were other hidden agenda besides the claim to spread Christianity.

Social and economic hardships in Italy led to this invasion. By attacking Ethiopia, Mussolini wanted to hide his domestic problems. During his reign, many European powers thought that the Italy was very strong. The external appearance convinced them that Italy was a strong nation. However inside Italy conditions were terrible. Inflation was high, unemployment was rampant, and public morale was low. Mussolini was aware of these problems and in order to turn away people’s attention from these conditions, he had to invade Ethiopia.

The personality and character of Mussolini was yet another cause of the Italo - Ethiopian conflict. First of all Mussolini was a great orator who would speak and leave everyone convinced. Therefore when he spoke, the Italians were convinced that it was necessary to attack Ethiopia. Above all Mussolini was an imperialist who wanted to extend Italian influence far away from the Italian boundaries. With such a combination of characters, there was no way Italy would avoid war with Ethiopia.

The desire to destroy Ethiopia’s independence led to the invasion. Apart from Liberia, Ethiopia was the only African country which had escaped European colonialism. This independence was envied by many European countries and Italy in particular didn’t like it. Besides, Italy claimed that Ethiopia was threatening her imperial ambitions in the Horn of Africa especially in Eritrea and Somaliland. It therefore invaded Ethiopia in to put an end to this threat.

The Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919 also brought about this crisis. This treaty gave Italy territorial left overs comprising of semi desert areas in North East Africa. Mussolini believed Italy was cheated by the treaty and therefore thought that he could compensate for his unfairness by acquiring Ethiopia which was better compared to other countries.

The weakness of the League of Nations also led to the crisis. The League of Nations was an international organisation formed 1919 by the victorious powers after the World War I to maintain World Peace and security. It had both strong and weak powers. It comprised of Britain, France, Brazil, Liberia, Ethiopia and many others. In total there were about fifty member countries in the league. But it had terrible weaknesses which Italy exploited in order to start the war. For instance it did nothing to stop Italy from invading Ethiopia. Previously the failure of the league to stop Japan from invading the China’s province of Manchuria in 1913 had inspired Italy to behave likewise.

The League of Nations followed the policy of appeasement towards Italy. Appeasement is a diplomatic policy aimed at avoiding war. So the league wanted Italy to remain happy so that it would not join Germany under Hitler. This was because after World War 1, Britain and France were scared of a possible alliance between German and Italy. Germany had been defeated by Britain and her allies in World War I but both Britain and France feared that Germany would revenge this defeat. Therefore Britain and France handled Italy lovingly. They thus secretly approved Italy’s intention to invade Ethiopia.

Ethiopia’s natural environment led to this invasion. Ethiopia had much better climatic conditions than the desert countries which he had obtained from the Versailles Treaty. Ethiopian soils were volcanic in some parts, the temperature was more or less temperate and therefore a variety of crops could be grown there. Some areas were actually even fertile. This attracted Italy to invade Ethiopia.

The military weakness of the Ethiopian army led to the invasion. The Ethiopian army since the reign of Emperor Menelik II had not undergone vigorous retraining and organisation. The army was not equipped with modern military hard ware and neither was it disciplined. It should be argued that unlike Emperor Menelik II, Emperor Haile Selasie had done little or nothing at all to modernise and upgrade the army. The Italians knew this and took advantage of it.

The expected support from Adolph Hitler of Germany led to the invasion of Ethiopia. The two leaders had been close and had collectively carried out similar aggression in Europe. For instance, they are both known to have overthrown democratic regimes in Europe. Their alliance and line of action had forced Britain and France who were key members of the League Of Nations (L.O.N) to adopt the policy of appeasement. This encouraged Mussolini to attack Ethiopia in the hope that he would not meet any resistance from these European powers.

The final conquest of Libya by Italy in 1912 led to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Libya became the official Italian colony in 1912. Following the First Treaty of Lausanne signed between Italy and Turkey, Italy was given a free hand in Libya. This conquest eventually inspired Italy to invade Ethiopia in 1935.

The aborted Nazi coup in Austria in 1934 led to the Ethiopian invasion. In an attempt to export his fascism, Mussolini attempted to cause a coup in Austria. He sent six divisions of the Italian army to assists the fascists in Austria who were behind the coup plot. The coup however failed. Mussolini thus invaded Ethiopia as a way of compensating for the failed fascist coup plot in Austria.

The disunity among the Ethiopian people led to the Italian invasion. By the time of this invasion, Ethiopia was a disunited country. Emperor Haile Selassie had driven a wage between the Amhara (whom he favoured) and the Galla. The Italians took advantage of this by collaborating with the Galla in order to invade Ethiopia.

The unpopularity and the weaknesses of Emperor Haile Selassie was another factor. Selassie was an unpopular and a wavering character that in this particular episode wrongly relied on the League of Nations to provide solution to the crisis yet he League’s members were all out to appease Mussolini. Internally, Haile Selassie did nothing to mobilise the people for serious war. Besides, the people of Ethiopia merely regarded him as a common dictator who had out lived his usefulness. All this gave Mussolini the motivation to attack Ethiopia.

Financial weaknesses of Ethiopia led to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Ethiopia was poor, it didn’t have adequate financial strength to sustain a protracted war against a well-organized military force. The treasury had been depleted due to corruption and poor management. The Italians took advantage of this to attack and conquer Ethiopia.

The abdication and the flight of Emperor Haile Selassie into exile on the 2nd May 1936 demoralised the Ethiopian fighters. The soldiers felt betrayed by their national leader. The vacuum created by the Emperor’s fight was exploited by the Italians to invade and occupy Ethiopia.

The home support and backing that Mussolini got made this war inevitable. His oratory skills laced with tactful lies easily worked the minds of the 42 million Italians. When he received the support that he desperately needed, he embarked on massive recruitment of Italians into the army in preparation for war and in 1935 he invaded Ethiopia.

It was the Wal Wal incidence which provided the immediate sparked for the war between Italy and Ethiopia. Wal Wal was a group of wells located 60 miles inside Ethiopia from the Somali boarder. In 1934, Italian troops marched inside Ethiopia and occupied Wal Wal. Ethiopians saw this as provocative move by Italy. The Ethiopian troops responded by firing at the Italian troops by killing some and wounding others.

 The matter was referred to the League of Nations for peaceful settlement since both Italy and Ethiopia were members of the League. Italy’s outrageous demand for compensation for the death of its soldiers at Wal Wal from Ethiopia was rejected by Ethiopia. Mussolini used this as an excuse for war. In 1935 he ordered the Italian troops to invade the kingdom of Ethiopia. By 1936, Italy had defeated and occupied it. This occupation lasted until 1941.

Revision questions:

1. Discuss the factors that led to the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-41
2. To what extent did Benito Mussolini contribute to the Italo-Ethiopian crisis of 1935-41?.
3. Account for the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935

“THE WAL – WAL INCIDENT WAS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE OUTBREAK OF THE ITALO – ETHIOPIAN CRISIS” DISCUSS

In 1930, Italy built a fort at Wal Wal, a group of wells inside the Ethiopian territory in the Ogaden region by close to 73.5 miles. Between 5th and 7th December 1934, the Italian forces clashed with the Ethiopians over Wal Wal. This incident was later referred to as the Wal Wal incident. The incident led to the deaths of approximately107 Ethiopians and 50 Italians and Somalis. The Wal Wal incident was primarily responsible for the Italo – Ethiopian crisis as here below discussed

The Wal Wal incident led to the unrealistic demand by Mussolini which fuelled the crisis and drove it into an open war. Mussolini unrealistically demanded that Ethiopian government pays Italy 2,000 pounds as war reparations and damages. He further ordered that the Ethiopian delegation salutes the Italian flag. More so, he demanded for an apology from the Ethiopian government. All these were outrageous and provocative demands which made the crisis inevitable.

The refusal by Ethiopia to honour the Italian demands led to the Italo – Ethiopian crisis. Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian emperor found the demands laid on table by Mussolini unacceptable. He therefore refused to accept them or even to acknowledge them. The refusal by Ethiopia to honour these demands was enough to enrage Mussolini into declaring a full scale war against Ethiopia in 1935.

The Wal Wal incident led to a world wide support for the Ethiopian government. When Emperor Haile Selassie referred this matter to the League of Nations, he received overwhelming support from the international community. Many world leaders viewed him as an innocent African leader who was simply being attacked by a greedy imperial force. Selassie therefore tended to believe that such a support would eventually translate into a military support. This made him develop a false confidence which strengthened his resolve to wage the war.

The Wal Wal incident exposed the League of Nation’s failure to deter Italian aggression using military means. On January 3, 1935, Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations for arbitration of the dispute arising from the Wal Wal incident. But the League's response was inconclusive. A subsequent analysis by an Arbitration Committee of the [League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations) absolved both parties of any culpability for what had happened. The failure by the League to deter the Italian aggression brought the war within the realm of possibility.

The buildup of Italian military forces in Eritrea and Somaliland in 1935 led to the Italo – Ethiopian crisis. On February 10, 1935, Mussolini mobilized two divisions of Italian troops and sent them to [Eritrea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eritrea) and [Italian Somaliland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Somaliland), which were the Italian colonies that bordered Ethiopia to the northeast and southeast, respectively. Ethiopia protested the ongoing Italian mobilization but here was little international protest in response to this build-up. The little or no international response to these developments emboldened Italy into invading Ethiopia.

The Wal Wal incident intensified Mussolini’s propaganda over the Italian public opinion. This won him the support from almost all Italians including his long term opponents. Mussolini was an orator, whenever he took to the podium, he left everyone convinced. He used his oratory skills to persuade the Italians to support his military adventure into Ethiopia ostensibly to punish the country over the Wal Wal incident.

The condemnation of Italy by the League of Nations as an aggressor during the Wal Wal incident led to the war angered Italy into war. On October 7, the [League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations) declared Italy to be the [aggressor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aggressor), and started the slow process of imposing [sanctions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_sanctions) on Italy. The sanctions were limited, however. They did not prohibit the provision of several vital materials, such as oil, and were not carried out by all members of the League.

The Wal Wal incident led to the imposition of an arms embargo on Ethiopia and Italy but strengthened Italy and militarily weakened Ethiopia. On July 25, Britain imposed an embargo on arms sales to both Italy and Ethiopia. Many historians believe that the embargo was a response to Italy's decree that it would view arms sales to Ethiopia as an act of unfriendliness toward Italy. Britain also cleared its warships from the [Mediterranean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean), allowing Italy further unhindered access to eastern Africa.

The Wal Wal incident increased the conspiracy of the whites against the blacks (Ethiopians). The Africans had been since time immemorial considered as a bunch of barbaric people whose creation and existence on earth was accidental. Because of this perception, the European member states of the League of Nations did nothing to intervene. Even Italy's use of chemical weapons and other actions that violated international norms did little to change the League's passive approach to the situation due to the negative attitudes of its members towards the Africans.

Despite the fact that the Wal Wal incident was primarily responsible to the Italo – Ethiopian crisis, there were other factors whose contributions equally sparked off this crisis though to a smaller extent. These among others included the following:-

* The desire by the Italians to revenge and reverse the humiliation of the 1896 battle of Adowa.
* The need by Mussolini to expand and export fascism.
* Italy’s military strength
* The impact of the Versailles peace treaty of 1919
* Italy’s envy of Ethiopia’s independence
* Italy’s desire to civilize Ethiopia which was regarded as uncivilized.
* Ethiopia’s threat to the Italian colonial ambition in Eritrea and Somalia.
* The Italian desire to revive the old Roman Empire.
* The desire by the Italian leader Mussolini to divert the attention of the public from his domestic and foreign failures.
* Failure by the League of Nations to check the Japanese invasion of Manchuria.
* The appeasement policy of the French and the British
* Mussolini’s character
* The abortive Nazi Coup in Australia.
* The final conquest of Libya by Italy.

***Revision question***

To what extent was Italy responsible for the Italo – Ethiopian crisis of 1935 – 1941?

EFFECTS OF THE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN CRISIS ON ETHIOPIA

In 1935, Italy attacked Ethiopia and by the end of 1936, Ethiopia had been occupied by the Italian troops. The Italian attack on Ethiopia had political, economic and social consequences which were both negative and positive with the negative consequences having a far much bigger weight as here below discussed.

Negatively, the political independence which Ethiopia had enjoyed for over 200 years came to an end as a result of this attack. Italy subsequently occupied Ethiopia from 1935 to 1941. The prestige and respect which Africans treated Ethiopia for its continued independence came to an end. Ethiopia now joined the list of the colonised Africa states. Italy’s ambition of ending Ethiopia’s independence was therefore fulfilled so Ethiopia lost its independence.

The war led to the flight of Emperor Haile Selassie to Britain. Despite his effort to put up a spirited resistance against the Italians, Emperor Haile Selassie’s troops were defeated and in 1936, he fled to Britain and later to Geneva. This internally created a power vacuum which made it hard for the people of Ethiopia to mobilise themselves against the alien (foreign) regime. Emperor Haile Selassie lost respect for having fled his country. To others this was an act of treachery

The Ethiopian army was seriously weakened and almost completely destroyed. Emperor Haile Selassie had not done much to modernise his army by the time this invasion took place, but Italy on the other hand had been preparing for this war for over 14 years. Right from 1922 Italy had trained many soldiers that Mussolini referred to as the “swift generation of Italy”. He had also manufactured many weapons against the interest of the League of Nations. Therefore when the war started, Italy used powerful weapons like artilleries as well as fighter jets for spraying poisonous gases on the people of Ethiopia. Thousands of Ethiopian troops were therefore killed while trying to confront the invading Italians.

The defeat of the Ethiopian troops indicated to the rest of the world the military hopelessness of Ethiopia. It also proved to the rest of the world that Haille Sallase had not trained and recalibrated his soldiers to the level of being capable of deflecting foreign aggression.

Ethiopia lost some of its territories to Somalia as a result of this war. After conquering Ethiopia, Italy divided it into four provinces. These were Amhara, Shoa, Galla, Sidamo and Moran. The Italians decided to add part of Ethiopia to form the greater Italian Somali land. In terms of territorial integrity, Somali therefore suffered a territorial set back.

Some Ethiopian tribes betrayed Ethiopian nationalism. This is because they sided with the Italians during the conflict. Those who sided with the Italians were mainly those who had been against the leadership of Emperor Selassie. It was therefore not a surprise that they were willing to support the invaders. However, there were a number of Ethiopian tribes which continued to be loyal to the deposed emperor. The loyalists picked up guns and continued fighting the Italians. Because of their effort, some of the areas of Ethiopia like the mountainous regions were not captured by the Italians.

The war also contributed to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. During the Italian invasion, Italy received a lot of support from Eritrea in terms of troops and military base. With this help, Italy was able to easily, defeat Ethiopia. This created a big conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This conflict continued to rage on even after the Italians withdrew in 1941.

Further still, the conflict led to the wars between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1970s. During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, Italy got a lot of support in the form of troops and other logistics from Somalia which the Italian used against Ethiopia. Italy also used Somalia as a base for attacking Ethiopia. In addition, after the war, part of Ethiopia was added to Somalia by Italy. Emperor Haile Selassie and the Ethiopians therefore treated Somali as an enemy state. In 1970, the two countries fought over the control of the province of Ogaden.

The war spelt disaster for and marked the end of the League Nations. It became clear that the League of Nations was an unprincipled organisation which was not capable of maintaining World Peace. The policy of appeasement and the fear to confront Italy raised credibility issues about the League of Nations. Africa condemned the World body and Europe was equally sympathetic to Ethiopia. The lack of trust for the world body eventually led to its collapse and the eventual birth of the UNO.

The Italians committed a lot of brutality on the Ethiopians during and after the war. In 1937, there was an attempted assassination of the Italian leader in Ethiopia. The Italians used this incident as an excuse to kill about 3000 Ethiopians mostly the educated ones. Over 1000 priests were equally put to death. It is equally believed that Italy used poisonous gas during the war. The worst brutality was the Gozan Massacre of 1937 where thousands of Ethiopians were murdered in cold blood. This led to depopulation and mass suffering of the people.

The Italo – Ethiopian crisis led to massive looting of Ethiopian resources by Italians. They used their occupation to exploit the country as much as possible. Thus many minerals were exploited. They also took the Golden Statue of “The Lion of Juda” to which the Ethiopian attached a lot of cultural importance. This consequently deprived the Ethiopians of their glorious cultural past and wealth.

The crisis also led to a lot of destruction of property. As the Italian troops poured in, they deliberately burnt villages in order to force Ethiopians to surrender. During the war itself, a lot more was further destroyed. This was meant to deny Ethiopian fighters what to survive on. The effect of this deliberate destruction of property was devastating on the Ethiopian populace.

Positively however, Ethiopia learnt a lesson out of this defeat. The conflict led Ethiopia to improve on and modify its military. Emperor Haile Selassie was defeated in 1936 partly because of poor military preparation. In 1941 when he returned to Ethiopia, he reorganized the army and made it much stronger. He recruited and trained many soldiers. He opened up international relations with countries like USA and Brazil from which he received huge quantities of ammunitions. Within a matter of time, Ethiopia had become a formidable military force with the biggest army on the African continent by 1960. This was strong enough to keep off further foreign threats.

The Italo – Ethiopian crisis became one of the most important factors which influenced the growth of African nationalism. The effects of this war was felt by the Africans the world over. It raised the level of African nationalism to its highest level. Before the Italian conquest of Ethiopia, Ethiopia was the only the only African country which had successfully beaten off colonialism. But with the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1936, Ethiopia joined the long list of the colonized African states. This annoyed the Africans within and outside the African continent thus stimulating spirit of nationalism.

In West Africa, the Italo – Ethiopian crisis affected the growth of African nationalism in a number of ways. In Lagos, huge demonstrations against the Europeans especially the Italians were held to show solidarity with the people of Ethiopia. The organizers of this demonstrations petitioned Britain to prevail over Italy to pull out of Ethiopia. They also came up with a number of plans against imperialism. For instance, many West African countries refused to buy Italian goods. In addition, they raised money to be sent to ameliorate the suffering of the Ethiopians. Many young Nigerians equally offered to go and fight on the side of the Ethiopians. All these were a manifestation of the growing sense of nationalism in Africa.

In West Africa still, two prominent Africans responded quickly to the crisis. These were Wallace John, a nationalist from Sierra Leone and Namdi Azikiwe , a Nigerian nationalist. The two were journalists by profession. Having heard about the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, they came together and wrote an article entitled “Has Africa a God? “. This article went further to attack Italian claim that they were spreading Christianity to Ethiopia yet Ethiopia had already acquired Christianity long ago. They further argued that even if Christianity didn’t exist in Ethiopia, there was no justification for Italy to use violence to spread it.

The invasion of Ethiopia attracted reactions from many African nationalists living in Britain. One of them was Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya. He reacted to this invasion in two ways: First, he wrote in one of the British newspapers called “The Labour Monthly” an article entitled “Hands off Abyssinia”. This article strongly demanded for Italy’s withdrawal from Ethiopia. Secondly, Kenyatta addressed a big gathering in Trafalgar Square where he attacked and condemned imperialism in Africa. He also vowed never to cut his beards until Italy left Ethiopia.

Another African nationalist living in Britain was Dr. Kwame Nkrumah from Gold Coast. Nkrumah was moving in one of the streets in London when he saw a headline in one of the newspapers. “Italy invades Ethiopia” Nkrumah was annoyed and made a statement to this effect;

“It is almost as if the whole of London has declared war on me personally and Africa in general. My nationalism surged to the fore” By this Nkrumah meant that there was no difference between Britain and Italy. After all, all of them were imperialists. Nkrumah then demanded in very strong terms for Italy to leave Ethiopia.

The West African Students Union (WASU) equally strongly reacted to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. This Union was formed in 1928 by West African students studying in Europe and its headquarters were located in London. Its chairman by then was Lodipo Solanke. When the Union learnt that Italy had attacked Ethiopia, it proposed a protest note in the form of a petition to be sent to the British government demanding for the quick decolonization of the entire African continent.

The war also exposed the conspiracy of the Whites most especially British and French against the Africans. The failure of the League of Nations to stop Italy from invading Ethiopia was a testimony to this. By its very nature, the league was expected to prevail over Italy in order to prevent the conflict. But the league seemed to have been in favour of Italy against Ethiopia. Both Italy and Ethiopia were not supposed to import oil and weapons during the war. However the league secretly allowed Italy to get these items in order to defeat Ethiopia. This convinced the Africans that the Europeans were united against the Black race. It therefore made them more nationalistic than ever before.

The Africans in New York also organised the huge demonstration which attracted up to 20,000 people. Several people took to the streets of New York to express their disappointment with the Italian invasion a well as the inability of the League of Nations to stop it from occurring. In the West Indies and the Caribbean countries like Jamaica, there were African demonstrations all over.

In 1941, Ethiopia was liberated by Common Wealth troops led by Britain. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Italy did not hesitate to join Germany against Britain and France. Therefore Britain organised soldiers from India, Uganda and Kenya and attacked Italian troops in Ethiopia. This led to the defeat of Italy and the restoration of the independence of Ethiopia. This second independence of Ethiopia became another source of inspiration to the Africans who were still colonised. They asked themselves that “If Ethiopia could struggle and regain its freedom once again why not the rest of Africa?”

In 1948, the Manchester Conference was held partly as a result of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. The conference was organised by George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah but was chaired by Dr. E.W Dubois. It was attended by very important delegates from USA, Africa and the West Indies. All in all about 200 delegates participated. During this conference unity and decolonisation of Africa took a centre stage and were exhaustively discussed. Participants agreed that they should return to Africa and lead the struggle for the liberation of their countries instead of talking from European capitals. They also agreed to form political parties to lead their people to freedom.

The war equally militarised the growth of African nationalism in Ethiopia. Rather than solely depending on diplomacy and peaceful methods as a way of liberating themselves, the people of Ethiopia realised that militarism was another good option. They therefore took up arms and violently resisted the Italians through the formation of a guerrilla movement called the “Black Lions”.

The popularity and profile Emperor Haile Selassie later increased. He became a great figure among the black figures in Africa and the world over. When he fled into exile, Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah warmly received him symbolising black solidarity. Many people within and outside Africa especially in the West Indies adopted the name Rastafarian names in honour of Haile Selassie who is regarded as the father of Rastafarianism. Today we refer to the Rastafarians as members of the Jamaican sect who regard the Blacks as the people chosen by God for salvation.

The Italo – Ethiopian crisis also extended to the Italian capital Rome. In 1937, for instance Italy organised a colourful celebration to commemorate the Ethiopian conquest. During this ceremony, a young Ethiopian nationalist called Zorai Doras who had been taken to Rome as a symbol of war booty was paraded in front of the important officials. As the celebrations went on, Zorai saw the Golden Statute of the Lion of Judea which had been looted by the Italians. He was over powered by national feelings to the extent that he grabbed a sword and killed a number of Italians during that function. He was also subsequently killed.

As a way of appeasing Ethiopia, Ethiopia was invited and became a founder member of the UNO in 1945. In so doing, the whites were attempting to wash away their guilt and their shameful act of conspiring against Ethiopia in 1935. He therefore thought that by making Ethiopia a founder member of the UNO, Ethiopia could be appeased.

The Italian attempted to appease Ethiopians by engaging in some infrastructural developments in the country. An equivalent of 100,000 dollars was rejected in the Ethiopian economy with a view of transforming the destroyed infrastructures. Roads were rebuilt as well as some schools.

They also attempted to put in place some social infrastructures like schools and hospital. Efforts were made to provide medical services. This was equally done with the belief that it would make the Ethiopians welcome the Italian rule in Ethiopia. However the effect (impact) on people’s life remained questionable.

Revision question.

Discuss the causes and effects of the Italo- Ethiopian crisis of 1935-41.

FACTORS WHICH LED TO THE DEFEAT OF THE ETHIOPIANS DURINGTHE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN CRISIS.

The Italian conquest of Ethiopia was speedy and swift. By 1936, the invasion which had started a year earlier had ended with defeat and the eventual occupation of Ethiopia by the mighty Italian troops. Thus the Italian without much resistance were able to establish their hegemony over the vanquished Ethiopians up to 1941 when they were finally ejected from Ethiopia by troops from the Commonwealth of nations. A number of factors militated against Ethiopians in this crisis leading to their defeat in 1936 as here below explained:-

The poor military strategy employed by the Ethiopians contributed to their defeat. The 1896 battle of Adowa was largely successful against the Italians because of the Guerrilla surprise attack strategy that Emperor Menelik II had employed.. Emperor Haile Selassiek had preferred with same welfare but the organisation of the strategy was poor resulting into the death of many Ethiopian forces including a early death of the minister of war Ras Mulungeta and Ras Makonnen. The early demise of these key military leaders greatly demolished the army leading to its defeat.

The general military weakness of the Ethiopian army resulted into her defeat. The Ethiopian army since the reign of Emperor Menelik II had not undergone vigorous re-training and re-organisation. The army was not equipped with modern military hardware and neither was it disciplined. It should be argued that unlike Emperor Menelik II, his successor, Emperor Haile Selasie had done little or nothing at all to modernise and upgrade the army. The Italian invasion necessitated the mobilisation of 25,000 Ethiopian peasants who incidentally had no adequate training in the military. This made the Ethiopian defeat inevitable.

The Italian army on the contrary was militarily superior. The defeat of Italy by Ethiopia in 1896 at the Battle of Adowa was partly because Italy had just unified as a state in 1870 and was therefore not yet a military power in Europe. The period after the Adowa defeat in 1896 witnessed the re-organisation and the modernisation of Italian army. With the adequate preparations made, the Italian army became strong enough to defeat Ethiopia.

The Italians had for long term prepared for war. It is believed that they had made preparations for more than four years before the attack. Within that time, they manufactured various weapons. Therefore by 1935 the Italian war machinery was ready to executive invasion with maximum precision. What was only lacking was a convincing excuse for the attack. So when a justification was concocted and the attack came on 3rd October 1935, the Italian success was within the realms of possibility.

The emergence of Benito Mussolini, a professed fascist dictator gave Italy the kind of leadership it needed to execute this expedition. It should be noted by 1935, the Italian army was one of the strongest not only in Europe but the world over. Mussolini was equally of the most aggressive leaders on earth. This therefore enabled Italy to build confidence it needed to defeat Ethiopia.

The support that Italy got from home translated into the defeat of Ethiopia. The defeat of Italy at the Adowa battle in 1896 was one of the most humiliating events during the period of scramble & partition. Most Italians never reconciled with this defeat &and they were therefore looking forward to having it retaliated. On top of this, the economic hardships which resulted from the economic depression and the devastating economic consequences of the 1st World War convinced many Italians that invading Ethiopia would bring economic gains to Italy. With all these support from home, Italy was bound to defeat Ethiopia.

The support by fellow European powers encouraged Italy and enabled her to defeat Ethiopia. The Italians had created an alliance with the Germans in the Axis alliance which also had Japan as one of its members. The precise plan of this alliance was to dominate the world. On the other hand Britain and France in an attempt to avoid trouble in Europe followed the policy of appeasement and therefore indirectly encouraged Italy to invade Ethiopia. It should be recalled that although Britain and France imposed an economic embargo in Ethiopia, they secretly allowed Italy to transport arms via Egypt to reinforce her military strength. This therefore enabled Italy to defeat Ethiopia.

The Italians also were supported by some African states neighbouring Ethiopia. These included Somalia and Eritrea. These were Italian spheres of influence and were therefore naturally compelled to support their colonial master during this crisis. These countries were also scared of Ethiopia’s growing strengthen in the Horn of Africa. They believed that the defeat of Ethiopia would bring about a balance of economic military power in region. Mussolini therefore used these countries as military bases, recruited many of their citizens and with the support of more than 100,000 African recruits from Eritrea and Somalia alone, he was able to defeat Ethiopia.

The Ethiopians were defeated because they were economically disadvantaged and generally poor. The question of economic backwardness is an old story in African politics. The people of Ethiopia just like their counter parts elsewhere were poor and therefore could not sustain a long and protracted war against the Italians. For instance there was no money to purchase confiscated military hard ware, no money to motivate the fighters and to buy basic requirements like military uniforms and food. The Ethiopians economy before the invasion was in a poor state with no industries. It was therefore conceivable that Ethiopian had no chance at in winning the war, hence their defeat.

The inadequate support from the League of Nations resulted into the defeat of Ethiopia. The League of Nations as the custodian of world peace and security was by then a mere barking dog which could not bite. The League of Nations had no standing army, lacked funds and therefore failed to contain the activities of European dictators like Benito Mussolini. The League of Nations also failed to enforce the principal of the respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of weaker states by stronger powers. The stronger member states were quick to propose the partition of Ethiopia rather than defending her sovereignty. The weakness of this world body therefore encouraged Italy to defeat Ethiopia.

The disunity among the Ethiopian people contributed to her defeat. The Ethiopian people did not fight as one group of black people as they did in 1896 during the Battle of Adowa. Emperor Haille Selassie was accused of being tribalistic. He also practised nepotism. He favoured only Amharic tribesmen at the expense of other Ethiopian tribes. The non-Amharic tribes like the Galla welcomed the Italian invasion and declined to fight alongside the Ethiopian armed forces. Due to their collaboration with the Italian forces the defeat of Ethiopia became inevitable. They revealed the strategic location of the Ethiopian troops and passed over vital information to the enemy troops making it hard for Ethiopia to win the war.

Similarly the disagreement between the high command of the Ethiopian army led to defeat of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian high command chaired by Haile Selassie disagreed over the method and the strategy of conducting the war. The Emperor who was well acquainted with the Italian military strength proposed a guerrilla war fare based on Mao Tsetung’s principles. The Emperor’s idea was ignored by his military generals such as RAs Mackonen Ras Mulungeta who considered the strategy as degrading and retrogressive. The failure by the Ethiopian army generals to harmonise their military strategy led to the defeat of Ethiopia.

The inadequate support that Ethiopia got from fellow African states led to its defeat. By then many of the African powers were still victims of European colonial rule and therefore couldn’t render the required support to facilitate the Ethiopians in their struggle against the Italians. Although most African Nationalists such as Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah expressed outrage over this invasion, they could not extend any form of tangible support to the Ethiopian struggle against the Italians. The support extended to Ethiopia was mostly moral and therefore couldn’t counter the military strengthen of Italians.

The internal dictatorship of Haile Selassie resulted into the defeat of Ethiopia. The emperor over the years had become intolerant and greatly oppressive. He violated fundamental rights of the people of Ethiopia. Such liberties and freedom included the freedom of speech and expression. He gagged (muzzled) the press and violated all forms of fundamental liberties. He became very unpopular among the people of Ethiopia who disliked him because of these bad internal policies. Many Ethiopians whose fundamental liberties had been violated by the emperor didn’t whole heartedly fight the Italians and this lukewarm attitude was partly responsible for Ethiopia’s defeat.

The conservativeness within the Ethiopian army especially after the departure of King Menelik II led to the defeat of Ethiopia. From the period of the Battle of Adowa (1896) the Ethiopian army didn’t undergo many changes. They still had the faulty and old rusty weapons that had been used against the Italian army in 1896. Their air force had only seven slow military planes. Ethiopian army had 371 bombs and 13 anti-aircraft guns. The army was composed of 250,000 men who were mainly peasants with no concrete military experience. This made Ethiopia unable to defeat Italy.

The Anglo–French trade and arms embargo led to the defeat of Ethiopia. In 1935, Britain and France declared an arm’s embargo on both Ethiopia and Italy but it hit Ethiopia most. When the emperor ordered for arm from Belgium, it was turned down, Italy on the other hand however continued to violate the embargo by manufacturing its own arms while at the same time stocking more from abroad. Much of these weapons passed through the Suez Canal which was by the under the control of Britain. In this way the Ethiopian capacity to mount a spirited military resistance against the Italians was reduced.

The flight of Emperor Haile Selassie into exile on the 2nd May 1936 demoralised the Ethiopian fighters. The soldiers felt betrayed by their national leader. The vacuum created by the Emperor’s fight enabled the Italians to strengthen their propaganda machinery and to many Ethiopians this demonstrated the king was unpatriotic. The king’s flight motivated Italy’s aggression. Left with no charismatic leader who would have helped to organise the ordinary masses into a protracted resistance Ethiopia was bound to be defeated.

Revision Questions:

Discuss the factors which led to the defeat of Ethiopia during the 1935 Italo – Ethiopian crisis.

THE ITALO-ETHIOPIAN CRISIS OF 1935 AND GROWTH OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM.

(How the crisis led to the growth of African nationalism)

The Italo – Ethiopian crisis refers to the Italian invasion and occupation of Ethiopia between 1935 and 1941. In 1935, Italy, under Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia and conquered it. The successful fascist aggression against Ethiopia had a resounding impact on the growth of African political consciousness and nationalism in a number of ways as hereof explained.

The Italo – Ethiopian crisis strengthened black unity and solidarity against white rule in Africa. All along the Ethiopia was looked at as a black man’s pride and fountain of black civilisation. The attack of Ethiopia was therefore regarded as an attack on the only remaining black man’s achievement in the world. The activities of these organizations inspired nationalists’ movements in other African countries to struggle against the colonialists.

The Italo - Ethiopian crisis showed the whiteman’s conspiracy against the black race. This was manifested when France and Britain which were by then the strong members of Europe under the League of Nations decided deliberately did nothing to stop Italy’s aggression. This became an eye opener to Africans in the entire world. They came to realise that the white man was ready to come together in time of need to inflict all forms of injustices on the blacks. This phenomenon inspired African nationalists like Namdi Azikiwe, Julius Nyerere and many others to mobilise and sensitize the masses against colonial regimes in their respective countries.

The Italo- Ethiopian crisis militarised and inspired African nationalism. Before this crisis, African elites had been bargaining for independence using a peaceful and diplomatic approach. When Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1935, the African nationalists came to realise that colonialism needed a military approach to over throw it. The eventual success of the Black Lions guerrilla movement in Ethiopia which had been formed by Ethiopians as a movement to resist the Italian aggression inspired the African nationalists to take up arms and fight colonial regimes in Africa.

The crisis sparked off hostile press attacks against colonial rule in Africa. Jomo Kenyatta for instance wrote in the ‘Labour Monthly’ one of the respected British Newspapers an article entitled ‘Hands off Abyssinia’. In this article, he strongly attacked the Italian invasion and in no uncertain terms demanded for its immediate withdraw. Similarly Namdi Azikiwe and his fellow journalist Wallace John from Sierra Leone wrote an article “Has Africa God?” in which they wondered if Italy had any moral authority and justification to spread Christianity as they claimed through the use of violence. This also triggered off political consciousness of the black people.

The crisis led to worldwide black demonstrations and strikes as a platform to champion Africa’s quest for independence. Africans took to the streets in Nigeria and Jamaica demanding an end to Italian aggression against Ethiopia. Elsewhere in UK, USA, demonstrations were carried out with black nationalists demanding for an end to colonial rule in Africa.

In Ghana Kwame Nkrumah organised the Ghanaians liberals working on the British Cocoa farms to go on strike. In Angola, the dock workers organised strikes against their colonial masters while in South Africa demonstrations led by Steve Biko were organized against the white racists. Apparently out of such violent reactions, the respective African states were able to build their political consciousness which enabled them to struggle for the independence of their countries.

It laid the foundation for the creation of anti-colonial organizations like the International Friends of Abyssinia which mobilized the whole world against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The movement was formed by West Indian Pan Africans like George Padmore from Trinidad and those from Guyana workjng closely with Jomo Kenyatta. and other nationalists from Ghana. The International African friends of Ethiopia was at the fore front in assisting Ethiopia liberate itself from Italian rule.

The Italo - Ethiopian crisis laid the foundation and catalysed the development of Pan-Africanism which spearheaded the struggle for Blackman’s freedom. Haile Selassie became a great apostle of Pan Africanism and together with the other African nationalists advocated for the unity of Africa. Nkrumah’s idea of creating a untied Africa was greatly shaped by Italo-Ethiopian crisis. Out of fear of another fascist attack on the African continent, the African nationalists of the time came together and formed the Organisation of African Unity to protect Africa’ sovereignty and its territorial integrity.

The Italo – Ethiopian crisis increased the Rastafarian activities in and outside Ethiopia. The Rastafarian movement sought to glorify the black man’s God, black man’s achievement, spearhead the condemnation of colonial rule and to show solidarity with Emperor Haile Selassie (whose real name before colonial episode was Ras Tafari) and who was regarded as the African messiah. The movement used culture, music and literature to increase its demand for the eradication of colonialism from Ethiopia.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia led to the Second World War which had profound effect on the growth of African nationalism. The war demystified the perceptions that the whites were demigods. Secondly, the Africans who went to fight in Europe realised that Europeans countries equally had problems. When they returned to Africa, their opinion about the whites had changed. They used the experience that they obtained during this war to fight for their own independence in Africa.

The Italo-Ethiopian crisis led to the collapse of The League of Nations which eventually led to the formation of the UNO in October 1945 at San Francisco. The UNO attempted as much to avoid the mistakes of the LON It came up with a very clear anti-colonial agenda and demanded that all colonised people especially in Africa be granted their independence. The UNO also encouraged leading nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere to use its General Assembly to attack colonial rule. In this way, the Africans were encouraged in their struggle against colonialism.

The crisis increased the political awareness of the Africans in Africa and the Diaspora. Upon over running Ethiopia, Italians introduced one of the worst forms of forced labour and oppression in Ethiopia. The natives didn’t allow this to go on and therefore joined the Guerrilla units. This became a source of inspiration of other Africans suffering from the same forms of colonial injustices like forced labour to rebel against their colonial masters. It therefore partly sparked off the Algeria rebellion of 1954 a well as the Mau Mau rebellion of 1952 to 56 in Kenya.

The crisis increased the commitment of the elites in the struggle against colonialism. In Nigeria for instance, African nationalists organised a big meeting in Lagos and passed the resolution calling upon Britain to put pressure on Italy to leave Ethiopia. It was also in this meeting that The Abyssinian Association was formed and later the Abyssinian Defence Foundation was created. A number of Nigerians later expressed readiness and volunteered to go and fight for Ethiopia. In addition Nigerians boycotted most of the Italian businesses in their country. This demonstrated the commitment of the Africans to set them free.

The restoration of Ethiopia’s independence by the Commonwealth force drawn from countries like Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and many others inspired the growth of African nationalism. The liberation of Ethiopia became a motivation for decolonisation of Africa. Many African nationalists started to ask themselves questions like “if Ethiopia is free today why not the rest of Africa tomorrow”. The second liberation of Ethiopia therefore galvanised the efforts of Africans to work harder towards the liberation of the whole continent.

The crisis increased the activities of West African Students Union (WASU) in the diaspora. This Union was formed in 1928 by West African students studying in Europe and its headquarters were located in London. Its chairman by then was Lodipo Solanke. The students’ union organised protests and demonstrations in Europe and Africa demanding for the quick decolonization of the entire African continent. This inspired the nationalists to struggle for the liberation of Africa.

Questions:

1. Examine the contribution of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis of 1935 to the growth of African nationalism.
2. To what extent did the Italo-Ethiopian crisis of 1935 lead to the growth of African nationalism?
3. Assess the contribution of the 1935 Italo-Ethiopian crisis to the development of African nationalism

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE TO THE HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA.

Haile Selassie was born in July 1892 from the royal family. He was the in the line of succession of the popular Menelik II of Ethiopia. At the age of 5, he joined school and shortly at 7 years, he could write in French. At 14 he was made the governor of Gali and at the age of 24 he became the area agent. In 1930, he was crowned the Emperor a post held until 1974. He was regarded as the modernizer of Ethiopia. DR Dag Hammarskjold wrote that “Selassie was the prophet of 1930’s and if you talk about the modernization of Ethiopia, you need to talk about Haile Selassie as the modernizer”. This was because of the achievements of Selassie which among others included the following;

Politically, Haile Selassie’s rule modernized the army and the police. Selassie made a fundamental reform in military by which cadres were sent for training. He also imported modern fire arms from abroad which strengthened the defense sector of the state. Trainers from Europe were also brought to Ethiopia to train the Ethiopian army. This made the Ethiopian army and police strong by African standards then

The Emperor established modern administrative structures in Ethiopia. He introduced order through bureaucratizing the administration. Administrative hierarchy was streamlined with a clear terms and roles to be played by those in administration. The correct and right officials were placed in responsible offices of the state. He did this with a help of highly educated Ethiopians and special advisers imported from developed countries. This reduced role conflicts in management and ensured efficiency in the management of state affairs.

Haile Selassie revised the Ethiopian constitution in 1955. He transformed Ethiopia from an extra-judicial and non-constitutional form of governance to a constitutional one through a series of reforms. To this end inapplicable and retrogressive commandments were abolished, repealed and replaced with more progressive constitutional mode of governance.

Haile Selassie promoted unity in Ethiopia. Through his good domestic policies he was able to bring together all sections of the Ethiopian society. He treated his people equally and never segregated them. Because of this Ethiopia became a basically united country by African standards at the time.

He played a key role in enabling Ethiopia regain its independence in 1941. When the Italians invaded and occupied Ethiopia in 1935, Emperor Haile Selassie was forced into exile. While in exile he mobilized support from friendly countries to liberate his country. With the backing of the commonwealth troops Ethiopia was able to regain its independence from Italy in 1941.

Haile Selassie played an imperial role and expanded the boundary of Ethiopia by annexing Eritrea and making it part of Ethiopia. When the British decided to withdraw from Ethiopia in 1952, Haile Selassie annexed it and made it one of the provinces of Ethiopia. This gave Ethiopia and expanded boundary.

He promoted monarchism in Ethiopia. Selassie was himself a product of monarchical rule. He came from the lineage of the legendary Emperor Menelik II who ruled Ethiopia up to early 1900’s. Being a product of the monarchical system, Haile Selassie maintained and promoted the system of monarchy in Ethiopia.

He is remembered in the history of Ethiopia because he promoted democracy and freedom of the press. Although he didn’t go far, Haile Selassie encouraged democracy through parliamentary election. He was among the first African leaders of his time to introduce European type of parliamentary democracy and the freedom of the press. As a result many people were able to participate in politics of their country.

Diplomatically, he established good foreign relationships. He did this through adopting interstate corporative policy. For instance, when Italy invaded Ethiopia he got support of many countries in Africa and outside Africa. He got a lot of assistance which led to his restoration in 1941.

Economically, Haile Selassie promoted infrastructural development in Ethiopia. When he returned to power in 1941, Selassie embarked on building roads and railways which greatly facilitated the economic activities and the effective movement of people including the administrators with in the country.

Selassie established the Ethiopian airline. This was a very big achievement because it helped Ethiopia to enter into effective communication with the rest of the world. At the same time it helped to transport the nationalists throughout Africa. In 1971, he opened up a civil aviation school to ensure the survival and management of the airline. Up to date Ethiopian airline exists and is one of the best in Africa with highly trained pilots and aeronautic engineers.

He promoted trade relationship with other countries: Haile Selassie established trade ties with other countries like and with the diversification economy he boosted in Ethiopia, products like Coffee, hides and skins exports increased tremendously which enabled the country to earn foreign exchange.

Haile Selassie modernized agriculture in Ethiopia. He imported skilled manpower to teach his people better and modern agricultural methods. Farmers were encouraged to plant better and high yielding seeds using the best agricultural practices. This led better yields and higher revenue for the farmers hence better standards of living.

He also promoted tourism in the country. He established modern hotels and made the tourism an economic priority in Ethiopia. As a result, Ethiopia became a tourist destination in Africa. Many tourists flocked to Ethiopia because of the beautiful scenarios, rare animals and birds as well as the Ethiopian physical features.

Haile Selassie promoted industrialization in Ethiopia. During his reign many industries sprung up in Ethiopia. He set up industries for shoe making, he also established textile industries for the manufacture of clothes of various nature as well as many other cottage industries. It was therefore during his reign that Ethiopia was set on the path of industrial development.

Socially, Haile Selassie outlawed and abolished slavery and slave trade. He put up a decree which banned slave trade and slavery in Ethiopia. Anybody caught in slave trade or slavery was put to death. As a result within 4 years i.e. in 1934 about 4000 slaves had been liberated thus curbing the evil of slave trade and slavery.

Haile Selassie promoted Sports and Games. Football, netball, Javelin among others was strengthened and during his time Ethiopia was always a participant in Olympic Games. But he discouraged other games like Chess and Horse riding because to him it was not taming nature therefore Haile Selassie was a modernizer.

He also greatly promoted education in Ethiopia. Schools were established from Primary to University level. Some students were even given scholarship to go abroad for further education. For instance, many Ethiopians went to Syria, Egypt, Britain and France. He also gave part of his glorious palace to serve as headquarters for the University. He established a civil aviation School in 1971

Emperor Haile Selassie emphasized and achieved the independence for the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia. In order to consolidate himself in power Selassie improved on the status of the church. For instance he gave large pieces of land to the church. He was exemplary and always attended church service at 6:00am. But he was very paranoid to and greatly hated Islam. This weakness contributed greatly to the 1974 revolution which ended his rule.

Haile Selassie promoted cultural revival in Ethiopia. Selassie further encouraged the Ethiopians to transform to modernity through modernization and upholding Ethiopian culture. In the same way he encouraged Ethiopians to maintain good principles and behavior in dressing, unity for everybody, etc.

Selassie also promoted the freedom of worship in Ethiopia. He allowed people of various religious denominations to worship freely and showed a good example to the rest of the populace by being an ardent church goer and always attended church service at 6:00am. But he was very paranoid to and greatly hated Islam. This weakness contributed greatly to the 1974 revolution which ended his rule.

Haile Selassie improved the health sector in Ethiopia. He established many hospitals and dispensaries to cure the most stubborn diseases. He also improved and modernized the traditional herbs. In addition, he kept on visiting the health units which made the workers to work hard. He was thus regarded as a modernizer.

Haile Selassie issued the first five year development plan in Ethiopia: In 1957 after opening up a Red Cross branch in Ethiopia in 1935 Selassie issued programs that were well planned. In so doing he was projecting himself as a modernizer of Ethiopia.

Revision question:

To what extent was Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia a moderniser?

THE 1974 REVOLUTION (COUP) IN ETHIOPIA

CAUSES OF ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION OF 1974

On 12th September 1974 a revolution (coup) took place Ethiopia. This revolution led to the overthrow of the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie by young Ethiopian army officers and the establishment of a new regime called the *Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army* or the Dergue with Lieutenant-General Aman Mikael Andom (a popular leader and a Sundhurst graduate though an Eritrean by birth) as the Chairman of the Provisional Military Administration Council. Haile Selassie was placed under house arrest and later executed. The Ethiopian revolution of 1974 took place mainly due to the following reasons:-

The grievances of the army led to the Ethiopian revolution of 1974. The young army officers especially those of the lower and noncommissioned officers bitterly complained about the appalling conditions under which they live. Their salaries were poor, the housing policies were bad and worst of all, there was discrimination in promotion in the army. The soldiers were further aggrieved by the poor military equipment and lack proper training in the army. They therefore resorted to the coup of 1974 as a way of ameliorating the deterioration conditions that they faced.

Hatred against feudalism led to the 1974 revolution. Ethiopians hated feudal dues which were a symbol of backwardness. This was accompanied with the system of land ownership which hampered the peasants from engaging in agriculture. The masses who were disgruntled rose up against the government in form of a revolution.

The government of Haile Selassie had become despotic and undemocratic. Haile Selassie’s government practiced autocratic system of governance. The parliament had ceased to play a functional role in Ethiopia because it was powerless and dominated by the emperor’s men. All democratic tennets had been abolished and no more political pluralism and party activities were being allowed. Those who opposed to his regime were regarded as foes, arrested, imprisoned or in extreme cases, execute. Indeed the emperor had turned himself into a dictator.

Furthermore Emperor Haile Selassie practiced favoritism, nepotism, corruption . he surrounded himself with his closest relatives and tribesmen whom he placed in key political positions. The key to acquiring a placement in the civil service became tribal affiliation and nearness to the regime and not ability and competence. This created discontent in the country prompting the army to act by overthrowing the emperor in a military coup.

The influence of the Ethiopian elites led to the revolution. The educated people and students opposed the government and demanded for various political, social and economic reforms. For instance the students engaged in strikes and demonstrations which convinced the army of weak government and need for reforms. As a result the emperor became unpopular and was ousted in 1974 coup.

The influence of Eritrean war of succession was responsible for the revolution. Eritrea carried out a war of break off for a period of 10 years in which Selassie adopted a military strategy to quell the struggle. However, his military means proved impotent since Eritreans kept on advancing and capturing territories, the army therefore demanded for dialogue as the best strategy to the civil war, but when the government refused the coup occurred in 1974 which ousted the emperor.

The outbreak of the severe famine of 1972 to 1974 led to the Ethiopian revolution of 1974. Ethiopians between 1972 and 1974 were seriously devastated by famine which gravely affected territories of Tigre, Shoa and Ogaden in particular. In this case the government was expected to intervene and save the population but nothing tangible was done. Eventually about 200,000 peasants died as a result of starvation. This made the government very unpopular and was therefore overthrown in 1974 revolution.

The failure of the emperor to reform the land tenure system led to the revolution. The majority of the peasants who owned no land demanded for a reform in the system of land ownership by removing the old system of the land tenure by which the laldlords heavily charged them. The problem of land was exacerbated by feudalism which hampered the peasants from meaningfully engaging in agriculture. The masses who were disgruntled rose up against the government and supported the military in this revolution.

The success of other coups elsewhere inspired the outbreak of the 1974 revolution. The success of other coups in Africa like the 1952 Egyptian revolution, the 1969 Libyan revolution, etc. could have motivated the Ethiopian nationalists under Major Mengistu Haile Mariam in October 1974 to topple Haile Selassie.

The economic mismanagement and backwardness led to the revolution. The time of the revolution, Ethiopia was one of the backward countries on the African continent. Infrastructures were dilapidated and inadequate, no tangible efforts had been to expand the railway system in Ethiopia, and the existing infrastructures were on the brink of collapse. Industrialization was at its lowest ebb and so was agricultural development.

These were compounded by the problem of hyperinflation and widespread unemployment perhaps resulting from the low level of industrial development and the inability of the government to promote agriculture which would have employed the biggest number of the people of Ethiopia. This affected the living standards of the people leading to misery and untold suffering among the masses.

The corruption and inefficiency which characterized the government of Haile Selassie led to the collapse of Haile Selassie’s administration. The government of Haile Selassie was too corrupt and inefficient. Government revenue was siphoned and banked in foreign banks like the Swiss banks. The corrupt officials equally stole gold, diamonds and jewels worth millions of shillings for personal pocketeering. The revolutionaries capitalized on such ills to oust the government of Haile Selassie.

The influence of the Church led to the revolution. This was another cause of discontent. The church was very influential in state affairs because Emperor Haile Selassie made it the dominant religion of the state. For instance it dominated the educational system and most of the clergy enjoyed limitless privileges. The revolution therefore took place in an attempt to end the church influence in the state affairs.

The external conflicts and the increased political instability in the region led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie. Amidst the internal weaknesses, the government of Haile Selassie was faced with conflicts from Somalia that wanted to annex the Ogaden province of Ethiopia. Indeed Somalia attacked Ethiopia several and at one point even occupied the province of Ogaden. All along, the government failed to handle the Somali crisis, made Ethiopia lose territories hence annoying the military leading to the coup.

Another factor was the influence of the cold war. The socialists of the Eastern Bloc gave in military assistance to the radicals to oust the government with hope of having access to Ethiopia. This was because Ethiopia was strategically located at the entrance to the Red Sea and the Oil routes.

The 1968 Students’ riots sparked off the revolution. During this year the students from Addis Ababa University revolted against the government for failure to make necessary reforms. This ended into clash with the police in which many students were killed and others arrested. Consequently the government became very unpopular and was therefore ousted in the 1974 coup.

Unfair taxation by the government of Haile Selassie brought about the revolution. The government in an attempt to raise revenue from the masses adopted compulsory system of taxation but even the ruthless and brutal methods employed in the tax collection made the masses especially the peasants to support the reformists which culminated into a revolution.

Thirst for power among the young army officers was another factor. Many young general of the peasants origins with no hope of promotion yet they had greed for power escalated the occurrence of the revolution. They had increasingly become impatient with Selassie’s gradualism in development because they wanted changes within an overnight. These were the like of Tafari Bante, Haile Mariam Mengistu and Aman Audom. Even after the successful coup they refused any chance of the return to civilian rule.

The failure to settle the question of Ogaden led to the revolution. The people of Ogaden province in the south for long had opted to secede from Ethiopia so as to join their brother in Somalia instead of adopting peaceful negotiation, Selassie employed and used violence means to support the secessionist which was very costly in both monetary and human terms. This provoked discontented officers to stage a revolution.

The Ethiopians had a strong desire to end foreign hegemony: Haile Selassie’s government was dominated by the foreigners who were employed as special advisors from Switzerland, France, USSR, etc. who repatriated the country’s wealth at the expense of the nationals. Americans for instance established their air base at Kagnew which annoyed Ethiopian patriots. For instance most of the graduates felt disappointed because they were unemployed hence they supported the coup of 1974.

The harshness of the 1931 and 1955 constitutions occasioned the revolution. These two constitutions gave more powers to Emperor Haille Selassie which annoyed the educated Ethiopians who interpreted it has a form of dictatorship. To worsen the matter, the two constitutions abolished the activities of the political tantamount to the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.

EFFECTS OF THE REVOLUTION (SUCCESES AND FAILURES OF THE DERGUE/ACHIEVEMENTS AND FAILURES OF MENGISTU HAILE MARIAM)

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution had a far reaching in the history of Ethiopia and Africa as a whole. This was because it ended the old despotic rule in Ethiopia and a new government called the Dergue was established in Ethiopia. The Dergue was a military junta (Provisionary Military Advisory Council) headed by Lieutenant-General Aman Mikael Andom (a popular leader and a Sundhurst graduate though an Eritrean by birth). Other leaders of the Dergue were; Aman, Tafari Bante to mention but a few. The impacts of this revolution were both positive and negative. The positive impacts outweigh the negative ones as here below discussed.

Economically, the Dergue introduced state planning in Ethiopia. Private assets and other factors of production like land were nationalized. In March 1975 a land reform decree was passed by which land was nationalized to effect agrarian reforms. This made about 7 million families who had suffered from feudalism gain land. Consequently peasant associations were set up to redistribute land with a limit of 10 hectares for an individual. Feudalism therefore came to an end.

Major means of production were nationalized. The government took over control of industries insurance companies, shops and super markets. In addition the government established mixed economy in which various sectors like tourism, mining and large scale construction were jointly owned by the government and private individuals or companies.

There was infrastructural development during this period. Small scale and cottage industries sprung in Ethiopia with the help of funds from the Soviet Union. This alleviated the problem of unemployment and served to provide income to the people. Roads and other infrastructures were also set up by the Dergue.

To ensure economic development and sustained growth, loans were borrowed by the government. The military government further embarked on the diversification of the economy. For instance, tourist industry was boosted; it borrowed loans from developed countries. It is on the history record that these loans were paid quiet well compared to other countries.

Socially, the Dergue instituted a number of social reforms. These were effected through extending education to the masses; medical services were even doubled to improve on the health status of the people. Land and houses in urban areas were equally nationalized and rent was collected by the government workers but was made cheap to favor even the low income earners. In the same way the urban dwellers associations were set up to administer housing affairs in towns.

There was an improvement in health service delivery in the country. The Dergue established many health centers which were spread throughout Ethiopia thus enabling the masses to have access to better health services. These health centers were well equipped with medicines as well as medical personnel. This led to the improvement of the quality of life among the people of Ethiopia.

Educational reforms were equally instituted through the introduction of universal and free primary education thus enabling a big number of children acquire education. An intensive literary campaign was also launched to enable those who were not fortunate enough to get education while young to do so at an advanced age.

The coup plotters adopted a new housing policy in urban areas: The new government nationalized land in urban areas and each family was made to have and use only one house, the rents were lowered but the land lords who lost land in towns and villages were not compensated.

Religious freedom was promoted by the Dergue. During the reign of Haille Selassie the Moslems were discriminated against, but the military government allowed freedom of worship and even encouraged appointment regardless of religion. In the same way the military government (DERGUE) separated the powers of the state and church.

The military government tried to solve the problem of famine. The government realized that the problem was resulting from prolonged draught and therefore encouraged the peasants to grow more food crops and store the surplus. Even in 1978 when the northerners faced famine the government sent food relief to them. Between 1984 and 1985 the government resettled about 600,000people from the drought stricken areas of the north. Although many people died, the government showed some evidence of care.

The government allowed trade union activities. The coup plotters provided some little bit of democracy through allowing the workers organizations to operate. For instance in September, 1984 the Ethiopian workers’ party was full recognized and a commission to organize and manage it was appointed by the military president Mengistu

There was a regime change as Haile Selassie was ousted. The revolution led to the overthrow of Haile Selassie who later died immediately in 1975. The coup plotters formed a revolutionary council called DERGUE led by Haile Mariam Mengestu. He adopted a socialist policy which had both positive and negative impact for his government.

The Dergue government extended equality was to all. The revolutionary council of DERGE recognized the uniformity of all peoples irrespective of the social – economic background. This was a great achievement because during the regime of Selassie other classes were discriminated. Mengistu brought about ethnic and cultural unity even the Muslims were encouraged to continue with their religion. The independence of Eritrea was also recognized shortly but later the policy turned in favour of uniting her to Ethiopia.

Tribalism which had been a problem in Ethiopia was minimized. Haile Selassie had promoted tribalism in which he favored the Amharic but the military government declared all tribes equal and no culture favored. For instance the Radio programmers were contracted in many languages unlike before when Amharic language was favored.

The local people were encouraged to participate in the affairs of the state. The Dergue government promoted the formation of peasant association and charged them with the responsibility of implementing the land reforms and settling local disputes especially from the land disputes. Even in urban areas, the urban committee was set up to le housing and to the urban disputes. This was a new development in the politics of Ethiopia.

The Dergue Government promoted peace and security. It created parliamentary right from the grass root levels to the top which ensured peace and Tranquility in the country. All the Ethiopians of all states were called upon to observe peace and benefit from the 1974 revolution.

Wereas much was achieved during the period that the Dergue was in power, there were equally a number of weaknesses that characterized the regime. These weaknesses among others included the following:-

Politically, the new Dergue administration practiced dictatorship and banned all political parties. The revolutionary council banned political parties and even association of workers and peasants that would have been used for mobilizing and sensitizing the masses were brutally banned for resistance e.g. Ethiopian Socialist Party was suppressed. The revolutionary council (DERGE) therefore became a worst dictator Ethiopia has ever witnessed. This partly explained why Mengestu was dethroned.

Widespread civil wars ensued in Ethiopia. There was emergence of guerrillas who were discontented with the military regime. Consequently the disgruntled civilians formed Ethiopia Peoples’ Revolutionary Party EPRA. Mengistu further became a great dictator who killed many members of EPRA and revolting students in the infamous “red terror”. He therefore became unpopular and in 1991 he was overthrown by the army in collusion with the rebels of the EPRA.

There were increased conflicts with the neighboring Eritrea and Somalia. The Dergue government was pre-occupied with wars to establish order. Mengistu for instance between 1987 and 1988 declared the war on the Eritrea secessionists. Ethiopia was also at war with Somalia over Ogaden which was a province of Ethiopia. Somalia was defeated but a high cost in terms of money and lives. The new governments also become unpopular.

Ethiopia was isolated as a result of this coup. The neighboring countries isolated Ethiopia because the adopted difference political ideologies. For instance Egypt became allied to the western capitalist bloc and USA established her bases there. While Ethiopia became a socialist state and USSR established her base there. The two countries, therefore, were involved in cold war politics and suffered the impact of neo-colonialism.

The Dergue government became brutal and unpopular: The clumsy attempt to impose collective seed farming and the brutal deportation of the starving masses to the north of the capital made the government very unpopular. In addition, Mengestu government aligned with Soviet Union a block well known for its repressive policies. This led to the brutalization of the masses.

Unfair arrest and arbitrary imprisonment became common in Ethiopia. Anybody suspected to be against the government would be arrested, imprisoned and killed under very mysterious circumstances. As a result most of the friends of Haile Selassie’s and trade union leaders disappeared in great number.

The coup resulted into the reign of terror in Ethiopia. This was characterized by fears and suspicion in which assassinations became the order of the day. For instance out of origin 120 members of the military council, about 60 had been killed by 1976. Terror was then extended to the opponents of the military government. In a worse record, Haile Selassie was arrested, imprisoned and killed under mysterious circumstances and later buried in a pit latrine. Even the graduates who demonstrated demanding for a return to civilian rule were massacred. This made the military government very unpopular.

The Dergue failed to reconcile with the supporters of the former ruling class of Haile Selassie. Instead they were arrested, incarcerated and some were killed including key political players. This led to unnecessary tension in country leading to state sponsored terror on suspected loyalists to the ousted regime.

The failure of the military junta to restore democracy and take back the country to civilian rule led to constant rebellions in the country leading loss of lives, destruction of property and untold suffering of the masses. Despite the promise to organize meaningful and credible elections and to promote democracy in the country, the Dergue held onto power without any democratic credentials. The masses therefore felt alienated because they were not given political space to participate in the affairs of their country

The Dergue signed agreements of political alliance with the eastern bloc. In entering an alliance with the Soviet Union, the Dergue was consciously or unconsciously promoting neo colonialism in Ethiopia with all its associated evils of exploitation, cultural degeneration and political subjugation.

Economically, no substantial improvement in the workers conditions of living was registered. The masses suffered from continuous economic distress characterized by low ages, high rocketing inflation, unemployment, poverty etc. the trade unions were banned workers who tried to demonstrate were brutally massacred which made the military government unpopular.

The land policies of the Dergue benefitted only a few Ethiopians from the northern part of the country especially those who were close to the system. The rest of the people remained landless. Moreover the nationalization of land also worsened the problem of famine in the country.

The Dergue also failed to control the biting poverty in the country. Much as some efforts were made to fight poverty among the people of Ethiopia, the masses especially the rural people of Ethiopia remained poor and economically vulnerable.

Socially, discrimination on sectarian basis resulted from the coup of 1974.The old sectarian tendencies that characterized the regime of Haile Selassie re-appreared because Mengistu killed people’s hope for unity and impartiality when, he reshuffled all the officers and replaced them with the Shoan – Amhara, his own people. This cult culminated into a coup of 1991 which ousted Mariam Mengistu leading to the rise of Meles Zenawi to power.

The 1974 coup in Ethiopia led to a terrible refugee problem in the Horn of Africa. The continuous harassments of the people by the military forced people especially the educated Ethiopians who feared to be killed to seek refuge in the neighboring countries. Even the former land lords and clergy who enjoyed Selassie’s regime fled the country in fear of their lives.

THE OVERTHROW OF MENGISTU HAILE MARIAM IN 1991.

(The causes of the 1991 coup in Ethiopia or the weaknesses /shortcomings of Mengistu and the Dergue/ the causes of the 1975 to 1991 civil wars in Ethiopia)

Reference questions

1. Account for the collapse of the Dergue by 1991
2. 'Mengistu Haile Mariam was primarily responsible for his own downfall.' Discuss

On 21st May 1991, Mengistu Haile Mariam who had himself catapulted himself to power in the military coup of 1974 (which overthrew the government of Haile Selassie) was overthrown by his own officials in collaboration with [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_People%27s_Revolutionary_Democratic_Front) (EPRDF), a coalition of rebel groups. He eventually fled with his family and some Dergue officials to Zimbabwe where is living up to now. The reasons for the overthrow of Mengistu Haile Mariam are here below discussed:-

At the beginning, the Dergue was faced with ethnic conflicts. .Ethnic groups like the Oromo and Sidona wanted to dominate the Ethiopian affairs at the expense of other groups. This caused civil unrest in the country. The government-of Mengistu had initiafly failed to contain the situation leading to increased suspicion and mistrust in the Ethiopian society.

Consequently, the Dergue was faced with hostilities from the former ruling class and sympathizers of Haile Selassie. They later formed the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) and cooperated with the anti-Marxist Sudanese government of General Nimieri. Menistu's government almost failed to silence the EDU who later joined the rebel forces against his government.

The government of Mengistu was faced with constant Eritrean secessionist rebellion: at the same time, Mengistu's regime was engaged in a full-scale war with Somalia over the Ogden territory until 1978. These military confrontations strained the Dergue government and the Ethiopian economy at large.

Internally, there were increased political instabilities in Ethiopia that the government of Mengistu failed to contain. The Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the north joined hands with other minor ethnic groups to form a military alliance in the name of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front under Meles Zenawi. Consequently, this military alliance caused the downfall of Mengistu and the Dergue.

Mengistu Haile Mariam fell from grace to grass because of dictatorship. He merely became a military dictator who replaced the aristocratic dictatorship of Selassie. He abolished the parliament even when it was non-functional, banned the activities of opposition politicians and spared no energy in liquidating his political opponents. Mengistu further abandoned constitutionalism and ruled Ethiopia through decrees. The despotic policies of the Dergue prepared grounds for the downfall of Mengistu.

The brutal oppression of the workers of Ethiopia by Mengistu led to the coup of 1991. Mengistu Haile Mariam was a cruel leader who dealt with the workers and students mercilessly. Workers’ demands for better working conditions following the introduction communism in Ethiopia by Mengistu was often met with utmost brutality from the state. The same applies to the legitimate demands from students for quality education. These and many others made the regime o Haile Mariam very unpopular hence making his overthrow inevitable.

The systematic elimination of political opponents led to the coup of 1991. Mengistu Haile Mariam became paranoid in the face of growing opposition both from within and outside. Within his own party a bitter struggle for power ensued, leading to the 3rd February 1977 shootout, in which key Dergue members like Tafari Banti and vice chairman of the Dergue, [Atnafu Abate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atnafu_Abate) were killed alongside 40 other officers. Mengistu justified the execution of Abate by claiming that he had "placed the interests of Ethiopia above the interests of socialism" and undertaken other "counter-revolutionary" activities. Such wanton killings discredited his regime making his overthrow inevitable.

His interference with the activities of the Workers’ Party of Ethiopia led to his downfall. The Workers’ Party which was meant to be a vehicle of socio – economic transformation in Ethiopia became a personal property of Mengistu who used it for personal political aggrandizement and fulfillment of personal political ambition and greed. The party therefore lost direction and became meaningless as many of its members decide to defect to the rebels. This was a serious blow to Mengistu’s regime hence the overthrow.

The land policy that was reformed by Mengistu did not benefit all Ethiopians. While only 700000 households were beneficiaries, majority of the Ethiopians especially in the south were not rescued from the customary form of land ownership that affected them severely; they were subjected to Feudalism and serfdom. The inconsistent land policy of the Dergue therefore reduced the popularity of the Dergue especially in the southern region.

The nationalization policy on land led to famine. The policy caused decline in agricultural production leading to severe food shortage. Following the nationalization, the government put much emphasis on state farms that promoted large capital-intensive farming with interest in cash crops as the peasant sector was ignored. Ethiopians embarked on coffee and cotton production at the expense of food crops, which led to starvation.

There were rebellions organized by elites who were not impressed by the socialist policies of mengistu's government. Due to this opposition, the government transferred students, teachers and other educated groups to rural areas under the guise of carrying out literacy campaigns. However, instead of silencing them, the educated masses began politicizing the peasants with an aim of preparing ground for their recruitment against Mengistu's government.

Mengistu failed to contain internal divisions within the Dergue. There were ideological conflicts between members who sympathized with socialism and those against the policy. Power struggles continued eating up the Dergue, which forced Mengistu to arrest and kill his rivals in the Dergue: the Dergue members selectively eliminated were, Bante, Atnafu Abate and Amon Andom,

Nationalization of land led to displacement of people. The displacement grossly affected the poor Ethiopian peasants in the south. In the process, families split which also lowered agricultural production by about 30%. In the due course, many people died due to lack of scurvy and proteins.

Generally, the famine catastrophe continued: even when the Dergue tried to give humanitarian assistance to the affected masses, starvation and suffering continued up to 1978. The humanitarian assistance was not enough to satisfy the expectations of the masses, and this tested the popularity of Mengistu.

The revolutionary government of Mengistu failed in her efforts to improve on the labour conditions. The minimum wage remained on paper while job registration was not implemented to ensure job security. The high levels of inflation froze the workers’ wages, strikes were banned and trade union leaders were imprisoned. The military government was hence discredited.

Poverty was not wiped out of Ethiopia. Many of the masses remained unemployed, suffered from economic constraints and survived on government handouts .By the time of the overthrow of Mengistu and Dergue, the economic situation in Ethiopia was appalling.

Mengistu embarked on intensive militarization at the expense of other government departments. Mega military deals with the Soviet Union and Cuba made mengistu to spend a lot of Ethiopian resources on communist artillery while other sectors of the Ethiopian society were under funded.

Mengistu Haile Mariam was overthrown because of his religious intolerance which promoted conflict among the various religious groups in Ethiopia. At the beginning of his reign he subscribed to the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia. During this period, he favored the Orthodox Church at the expense of other religions like Islam. When he abandoned Christianity, he became hostile and intolerant to free worship. This alienated him from the people leading to his overthrow.

With the above weaknesses that characterized the regime of Mengistu and the junta (military regime), the Dergue could not continue in power. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front Meles Zenawi opened up a guerrilla war against Mengistu, which later led to the downfall of the Dergue' in 1991. A transitional government was put in place led by Meles Zenawi.

After making a new constitution, Ethiopia returned to civilian rule elections were held and Meles Zenawi overwhelmingly emerged as the winner. He became the first executive prime minister of Ethiopia in 1995, a position he has held till he died

***Revision Question***

Account for the civil war in Ethiopia between 1975 and 1991

***Answer***

Identify and explain the weaknesses of both Emperor Haile Selassie and Mengistu Haile Mariam. Their weaknesses led to the civil wars. Note that the civil wars were spearheaded by [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_People%27s_Revolutionary_Democratic_Front) (EPRDF), a coalition of rebel groups.

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