**Father Mussie Zerai, Allegations of Facilitating Illegal Immigration & Meron Estefanos**

*By Francesca Totolo*

We have already spoken in a previous insight into the figure of Father Mussie Zerai (NGO Analysis in the Mediterranean) and on Habeshia, an organization he founded with the purpose of "helping migrants to come to Europe". Habeshia has developed an online platform, Watch The Med ( Sea-Watch partner , one of the NGOs operating in the Mediterranean), online mapping to monitor the deaths and violations of migrant rights at EU maritime borders, in addition to have drawn up a guide to assist migrants during their voyage and once they reach the Italian coast [1]. It also contains the link of the most famous vademecum "Welcome to Europe" now published by Feltrinelli. [2]

Father Mussie Zerai, the self-proclaimed "Father Moses" in his last book, was arrested last August by a warrant for the allegation of "facilitating illegal immigration" following inquiries conducted by the prosecutor of Trapani. The same investigation also involved the NGO Jugend Rettet, with the seizure of the ship Iuventa and three notices addressed to the members thereof. [3]

As reported in *il Giornale* [4], "Father Zerai seems to be a migrant switchboard, but if you signal the inflatables from the start, without imminent danger to people on board and maybe you are being handed over by traffickers, it's complicity. The same accusations made by the prosecutor of Trapani to the German NGO Jugend Rettet, owner of the Iuventa ship, seized for this reason by the judiciary. Not only that: the Navy has undergone pressures and blackmails by Father Zerai, who in practice intimated to go to retrieve migrants otherwise he would report a hypothetical omission of rescue. And the Eritrean regime has long accused the priest of being part of a "group" of human rights activists in Europe, which in fact favors illegal immigration and has political interests. The regime of Isaias Afewerki is certainly very similar to a dictatorship, but it does not seem to be a case that after years in Rome Father Zerai was transferred from the Vatican to Switzerland in the far Friborg."

*Il Giornale*'s article suggests that Father Zerai is involved in a network of activists based in Europe who are opposed to Eritrean President Afewerki (Eritrea and NGOs: Resilience vs. Assistance and Refugees in Independence Square) with the aim of destabilizing its government also with the support of Western nations and international NGOs that have long been "banished" from Eritrean soil thanks to the "self-reliance" vision that drives reconstruction in the African nation.

In Sweden, we find another prolific Eritrean activist, Meron Estefanos, which established close working relationships with Father Zerai, as she already stated in NBC News in 2015, saying: "He is our ambassador. Usually called the Embassy. Instead, our people call on Father Mussie when in trouble." [5] An Eritrean newspaper, Tesfanews, in 2015 even wrote a true "sponsored" European organization by the US Department of State: "Emerging evidence suggests that activists of regime change, Mussie Zerai, Meron Estefanos and Elsa Chyrum have all been involved in facilitating the trafficking of young Eritreans." [6]

Meron Estefanos is an Eritrean human rights activist and co-founder of the International Commission on Eritrean Refugees (ICER), an organization that claims to be active in defending the rights of Eritrean refugees, victims of trafficking and torture. [7]

Estefanos also collaborates with Radio Erena [8], satellite broadcasting radio to Eritrea (transmitted from Paris) and designed by dissident journalists from Eritrea abroad with the financial support of Reporters Without Borders [9] (an organization sponsored by Open Society Foundations, Ford Foundation, American NED - National Endowment for Democracy, French Government and Swedish SIDA ). The purpose of Radio Erena is to offer "news and information that is independent of Eritrea in Eritrea" and declares itself "independent of any political and government organization", A statement that proves false after a quick look at the supporters of its main donor.

Like Father Mussie Zerai, the Eritrean journalist seems to know in advance the departure of her fellow countrymen from the Libyan coasts as evidenced by her many tweets in recent years. The last one is a few days ago and Estefanos speaks of the departure of 2000 Eritrean migrants. [10]

Perhaps Meron Estefanos is continuing the "humanitarian commitment" of Father Zerai, interrupted after receiving the court notice for "facilitating illegal immigration"?

From September 28th to October 1st, will be held the festival "Internazionale a Ferrara" [11], created by the daily online *Internazionale* in collaboration with Doctors Without Borders and the European Commission, which will see the participation of Father Mussie Zerai (which will also advertise his book "Father Moses") and Meron Estefanos. Both will be the speakers of the conference "Eritrea - The kingdom of fear. Repression, violence and unlimited leverage: why Eritreans flee to Europe".

The presumption of innocence is obviously established up to the third degree of judgment, but would it not be prudent and appropriate to wait for the closure of the prosecution of Trapani before "sanctifying" and "legitimizing" the work of Father Mussie Zerai through prestigious invitations at festivals and conferences? Perhaps his "work" is continuing through the activity of other people close to him and not resident in Italy, such as Meron Estefanos?

We focus on this article, inviting the reader to listen to a song that is becoming very popular in Eritrea thanks to his message: " Aytitehamel Gobezay " (Do not be naive young man/woman). The song addresses the young Eritreans and invites them to stay in the homeland to contribute to the reconstruction, pointing out that "not all that glitters is gold" in overseas countries. [12]

Obviously, the message is in sharp contrast to what Eritrean "made in Europe" activists have said, such as Father Mussie Zerai and Meron Estefanos.

<https://www.lucadonadel.it/padre-mussie-zerai-le-accuse-di-favoreggiamento-immigrazione-clandestina-e-meron-estefanos/>