

Looking backwards: the case of Eritreans and Ethiopians

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Why looking backwards instead of forward could benefit Ethiopians and Eritreans?

I was born somewhere between 1941 and 1943. This is the year when Fascist Italy was defeated in Eritrea as well as in Ethiopia. I was born on the 13th month of Paquemem - the beginning of September, in a village without a vowel. ZGB comprised not more than three hundred household. This village, we call it AADDI was the cornerstone for self-reliance in every aspect of the word. I mean geographically, politically and religiously. But I had to leave ZGB by the age of 5.

Where did I go? To Ethiopia, I presume for I did not know I was non Ethiopian at the time. At the time, I only knew AADDi, no more no less. It was a terrible experience for me to depart from the surroundings and people I know especially from my beloved parents. A one day trip by bus relocated me in the town of Adigrat, Agame.

Fast forward, I ended up in Finfine, now Addis Ababa. There in Addis, I have lived for 36 years almost in every Sefer – Ethiopian way of neighborhood as opposed to Gorebet- Eritrean way of family hood.

Fast forward again, I am in the United States of America since 1986 i.e. for 30 years. Do I live now in neighborhood or in family hood environment? The answer is none.

I want to live in the community of family hood (gorebet) and neighborhood (sefer). This is what Einstein call time and space. The Ethiopian and Eritrean Community is in disarray. Why? The answer will be revealed in the following few paragraphs.

Community and cultural history of Eritrea and Ethiopia

The concept of community and culture survived side by side for Millennia in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is well established by physical geography of Dega-Weina-Kola. We usually say Weina-Dega and not Weina-Kola. This was not out of disregard but for lack of Technology to control malaria and tsetse fly. The low land areas alias Kolas were abandoned for a long period of time until the onset of the Eway Revolution. The Eway Ethiopian Revolution was designed to incorporate the lowland people into the main stream of community and political culture of Ethiopia. How was this to be carried out? That was the main problem that was then and now! Via languages or politics? The answer is left to the readers.

As one can observe and digest from my personal narrative, the migration, both emigration and immigration of people into Ethiopian territory was voluntary and non-coercive and non-issue. Everyone has a land to till, to herd, or to play. Land is plenty for all to use but maybe not to sell. Rural Eritrea and Ethiopia are still inhabited by peasants and herders. Urban attraction was not in their minds and hearts of either Eritreans or Ethiopians. All they aspired was respect, recognition and justice from their local authorities.

Above all Ethiopian and Eritrean peasants do not want to be forced by anybody other than EGZIABHER. Take for instance, the peasants of Dibatee – an outskirts in Metekel in the region of Godjam who migrated from Wollo into this mentioned place. As they were not forced to migrate, they became very successful community. In fact, they were producing enough Teff for the Eritrean teff consumers. The

story goes on about voluntarism for migration. The ugly situation arose when Ethiopian government and Eritrean Federal government interfered in each others affairs. How is this so? Here is how.

The effect of Adwa on the creation of Eritrea

Through voluntarism for nationalism, Ethiopian and Eritrean peasants fought side by side to repel the multi-faceted foreign invasions during different eras at different places. The slogans at the time were trio:-

1. invaders who will take your **land** are coming
2. invaders who will snatch your **wife** are coming
3. invaders who will impose their **religion** on you are coming

These were the core values of both Ethiopians and Eritreans and they have/are to react to these issues vehemently and they did and are doing. What has happened after the war at Adwa in 1886, gave ammunition to the colonizers to divide the country of Ethiopia proper. Minilik II of Shewa not Minilik I of Eritrea had abandoned Eritrean brothers to be colonized by Italy. The reason he gave was the incapacity to pursue on destroying the invading Italian army. This has costed the Ethiopian government not to be trusted by Eritrean elites. A **regrettable offense by Ethiopian government towards Eritreans that lasted for 110 years.** This regrettable situation vis-vis the victory of Adwa has to rest once and for all. A lasting closure should be in order. To talk only about victory of Adwa is useless and valueless.

On another of equal importance issue is the following:-

Regrettable offense by the Eritrean Federal Government that lasted for 55 years.

In December 1960, the Menghistu brothers have attempted to change the Ethiopian government using the Body Guard of Haile Selassie I. As is recorded in historical books, the first step in using to topple a government is a coup d'état, a French vocabulary for splitting the government and the state. This attempt by the Menghistu brothers could have spared Ethiopians from indulging in unabated and bitter revolution that was seen in the annals of the DERG and its follow ups.

But the Eritrean Federal government has helped Haile Selassie I to reclaim his throne. This is how it happened. At the time of the attempted coup d'état by the Menghistu brothers, Haile Selassie was in Brazil. The calculation was that he will remain as a political asylum somewhere in Europe or America as he has been before in London. According to the plotters, there would be no bloodshed but peaceful transition. But the Eritrean leaders in the name of Asfaha W. Michael, Chief Executive of Eritrea and Tedla Ukbit, Chief of the Police Force of Eritrea aborted or rather betrayed the Ethiopian search for change of governments. Haile Selassie arrived in Asmara, warmly received (see Newsweek's cover). In return for the favor by the Police Chief, Emperor Haile Selassie gave a golden pistol where later on, it was rumored he killed himself using the same golden pistol. This is another way of looking at Eritrean fault or betrayal to the causes of Ethiopians.

I remember during the coup d'état, we were in High School and were disturbed by rumors that the Military has lost its battle with the Body Guard and are desperate to kill students on campus. For fear of retaliation, many students evacuated the school campus. Eritreans in the school gathered around an elderly student named Kidane Mariam Redda who encouraged all of us to be calm and wait for any eventualities. As members from Eritrean region, we stayed in the school campus, I was one of them. I

did not know what else to do apart from staying with my folks. That was the story of my association with Eritrean high school students.

As to my association with Eritrean University students, there was a vision that could have united us together with Ethiopian students. The Ethiopian University student body, led by USUAA took one further step to make a united Front for united Ethiopia under a Eway Ethiopian Revolution. The Ethiopian Revolution was intended to redress Minilik's incapacity to keep Eritreans within Ethiopia proper and to modernize Minilik II's rule of law.

We have to admit that both Miniliks I and II have created confusion to the unity and disunity of Eritreans and Ethiopians. That condition was the galvanizing factor behind the common cause of EPRP of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The political, military and social history of EPRP in both Eritrea and Ethiopia has to be told and retold in order to reach at an agreeable peace and reconciliation. There may be other ways, but this is another way of looking backwards instead of forwards.

Conclusion

Minilik I, the son of Queen Sheba, regardless of his birth place and origin has lived in Axum some three thousand years. His contribution was that he brought the Tabot i.e. Egziabher's written command given to Moses. This "constitution" is still the moral guiding principles of both Eritrean and Ethiopian people. The town of Axum and Minilik I are our heritages. If there is dispute on these heritages by either Ethiopians or Eritreans, I have not heard.

Minilik II, lived and ruled from a town of Ankober - a century and a half years ago. Regardless of his origin or place of birth, he tried to modernize Ethiopia by balancing his thoughts and actions by "Embiyew and Ishi Nnege" meaning yes/no. That was a brilliant idea of the day. These points of diplomacy and politics are also our heritage, if not our current methods of survival. If there is a dispute of this heritage by either Eritreans or Ethiopians, again, I have not heard.

The question is what has happened to our heritages of Axum, of Ankober and of ZGB? We need answers to coordinate and collaborate. I personally believe that the town of Axum is our origin for civilization, Ankober, our source for diplomacy/politics and that ZGB is our destined self-reliance of economy.

TRUTH WILL PREVAIL

For questions and concerns

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ⁱⁱ Wolde Tewelde = Weather and Traffic, weather for politics and traffic for economics in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. I have been proposing on ONE SYSTEM and TWO COUNTRIES in the case of Eritrea and Ethiopia. One main reason is our climate and weather which will give us a clue for this proposal. Is our calendar confuse us or liberate us? Whatever it is for now Happy New Year for 2016.