

“One man eats, another says grace!” – Eritrean Highland-Lowland Splits

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Introduction:

To begin with let me ‘get to the nitty-gritty’ and thank EMDG and EPDP Board members and those individuals who genuinely requested me to make correction on a name I mentioned in my earlier article by goofing-up EMDG for EPDP. Indeed I have exchanged contacts on this matter both with EMDG and EPDP Board members. By mistake I did point out EMDG as the outcome of the merger. Really, the correct information is that a merger had taken place among 3-Eritrean Tigrinya highlander opposition groups (i.e., the Eritrean People’s Movement; the Eritrean Democratic Party; and the Eritrean People’s Party) as per their joint political resolution communicated on December 31, 2009. So their merger is thus known as the ‘Eritrean Peoples Democratic Party’ (EPDP). With this, I resort to the essence of this article.

Charles Swindoll wrote in his known book: "Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life" stating that: “Courage is not limited to the battlefield or ... bravely catching a thief in your house. The real tests of courage are...the inner tests, like remaining faithful when nobody’s looking; like enduring pain when the room is empty; like standing alone when you’re misunderstood; like fighting for what is right even when you know you are going to lose.”

Likewise, I wrote this article with the hope that the explanations provided herein below will eventually sink well into our Eritrean ‘highland Tigrinya stakeholders’ minds ‘who are stepping on our toes’ must clean-up their hitherto existing attitudes and positions pertaining to Eritrea’s future. Regardless of name-calling and foul language poured at me from several Eritrean Tigrinya individuals who in most cases bubble with angry words like boiling water on high temperature; and with high flying supremacist and defensive attitudes, I still maintain my stand and insist on sharing my views with the wider reader community till the truth sinks and makes difference in terms of bringing the downtrodden pastoral communities’ perspectives in Eritrea to the fore. To this effect, if my article sounds provocative and confrontational, indeed, so it is. In Afewarki’s Eritrea the saying: “One man eats, another says grace!” holds evident. Our ancestors land has been taken away by Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling Junta; and in reality we have no land in our own possession; except for use right mainly controlled by Afewarki’s watchmen. My belief in this is that one day, if and when concerned readers search and research for the absolute truth, they will definitively land upon and recognize the reasons why our pastoralist communities’ final decisions remain consistent and undeniable. From the outset, Eritrean highlanders need to change their attitudes towards marginalized societies within Eritrea instantly. Instead of trying to maintain the status-quo held-up by Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling Junta who always pretentiously tell us and the rest of the wider world that Eritrea is an entity designed for commonly sharing its endowments and resources by all its citizens alike, highlanders need to relinquish such cover-ups and denial opinions for the better. In fact, the following Chinese Proverb sums-up the reality we face on the ground in today’s Eritrea specifically: “He who rides a tiger is afraid to dismount”. Undeniably, highlanders seem afraid of us lowlanders and don’t want to dismount from their power throne carried on our shoulders thus far.

Eritrea’s Highlanders Contra Lowlanders:

At the cost of being labelled by few Eritrean highlanders as an inflexible person, let me reiterate and assert the subsequent realities on the ground just for the sake of clarity. I read through EPDP’s recent political resolutions where, in general terms, universal declarations on presenting evidence before the Eritrean public concerning missing human and legal rights issues are noticeably mentioned; and reasons are spelled out why EPDP stands opposed to Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta. Other than that, no where have the EPDP political declaration document mentions characteristically about conditions and challenges faced by the marginalized pastoralist societies within Eritrea proper. Overall, looked at from lowland, pastoralist, Muslim communities’ perspectives, the subsequent 3-key points are unconditionally critical to the future of Eritrea:

First of all, the Eritrean highland Tigrinya Christian and the lowland Pastoralist Muslim splits have not yet clearly been thought-out giving ways and means for Eritrea to grow and mature as a qualified nation state. Essentially, the democratic means to unify the Eritrean highland Tigrinya Christians and the lowland Pastoralist Muslims still linger quite out-of-the-way. Indeed, Eritrean highlanders and lowlanders have

much less mutual interests that tie each community as a unified federation to match each other's values and move together to a point of nation reinforcement. If at all there are a couple of things that we share in common within Eritrea, these are nothing but the debacles and troubles pouring on both highlanders and lowlanders by Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta; and these specifically when it comes to: (a) drafting our young boys and girls into Sawa military garrisons; and (b) paying forcibly our cash at hand to PFDJ-ruling junta's tax collectors. Amidst this, the vast majority of Eritrean highlanders still continue to display plain defensive characters alien to our marginalized pastoralist groups within Eritrea proper. Based confidently on their chauvinistic stand point, highlanders try every means available to them to twist our arms and persuade us by hook or crook to go their way without making any sensible concessions. They are intolerant for any bragging about coming their way from our side concerning about our felt needs and livelihoods. Rather, highlanders want us to firmly abide by their extremely acute motto of the day that goes: "Hade-Widib, Hade-Hizbi, Hade-Libi!" By so saying, Eritrean highlanders refuse to understand our fate as marginalized pastoralist-population. By all accounts and by any means, they want us to admit the existence of Eritrea as a state; and fear for any hurdle that may put the making of Eritrea at risk. But, both at the leadership and at the community levels, the reality is different than what they imagine. The gaps distinctly splitting the Eritrean highland Christian neighbors and the lowland Muslim population remain evident and widespread. In our pastoralists view, Eritrean Tigrinya highlanders, who are alien to the lowlander cultural and socio-political norms and ethos, must understand the naked reality that there is nothing clutching us collectively with them; and holding us in bondage as a unique body within Eritrea as such. So our serious advice to Eritrean highlanders is simple and straight forward: "Don't count your chickens before they hatch". Don't count on us pastoralists before the bridge you try to mend for sustained relationships with us are clearly spelled-out and reinforced on mutual terms.

Secondly, a reminder to Eritrean highlanders is: "Don't put all your eggs in one basket"; and stop demanding to stand for: "Hade-Widib, Hade-Hizbi, Hade-Libi!" After all, how can you claim a solidified mind and heart in a diversified entity? How closely are you highlanders actually tied in affinity with us the lowlanders? How close do we know each other to share Eritrea as one roof with you? These are deeply engrained questions begging for proper responses. At the end of the day, Afewarki's craftsmanship towards solidifying Eritrea as a sustained state has not yet materialized as initially intended. Nor does it have substantial basis for Eritrea's future. Indeed, except for those from Rashaida origin, there is hardly any group within Eritrea that can fulfill the state / fatherland / definition. In this case, and other ground touching and deeply rooted lineage quarries, I suggest, any one interested to delve into this matter and read: 'ZANTA ERITRA' by Fit. Michael Hasama (a Mansa'e himself) composed in Tigrinya. By examining this matter deeper from linguistic and socio-cultural affinity points of view, one concludes that Eritrean Tigrinya highlanders descend from eight sub-groups with their roots deep inside Ethiopia; but with no common point of departure into Eritrea. Only the Tigre speaking group holds strong affinity to all other Eritrean Tigrinya highlanders and their extensions inside Ethiopia. Other than that: (a) The Hamassein and Akele Guzai highlanders are of the Meroni decent whose ancestor – Meroni was said to have moved down to Hamassein tracts from Dembya in Begemidr, located in Gondar inside Ethiopia. (b) The Mine-Fre highlanders are also of the Begemidr, Gondar origin inside Ethiopia but could not trace their original forefathers distinctly. Indeed, Mine-Fre, which means: 'Let God Fulfill' was coined as they seem not knowing who their Gondari ancestor by name was. (c) The Seraye highlanders are of Adkeme-Melega origin claiming to have moved into Eritrea from Lasta and Gojjam tracts deep inside Ethiopia. (d) The Asmee / Deki-Ishmaelo of Arba'ete Asmara and the DekiShihai of LegoChewa (touching upon the Hamassein and Seraye highland tracts) are of the Asawerta descents. (e) The Anganaa Christians around Dekemhare are of the Hazo-origin that trace their roots inside Tigray; just like other Tigrinya highlanders who tress their decent deep into Adwa, Tembien, Shire Enda Sellasie and Kilde Awlallo. (f) The Ankala Afar Christians around Tserona are of Afar origin. Therefore, the Eritrean Tigrinya highlanders simply disqualify from the Biher / Nationality / definition. The Tewke and Terke Bilen trace their decent from the Meroni (Tewke), and Adkeme Melega (Terke). In fact, "It is time to pay the piper". It is time for highlanders to face the consequences of the unchecked actions done thus far.

Thirdly, as we (Afar, Kunama, Saho, etc.) pastoralists need to: "Give the devil his due" the side road forward for us deprived of our privileges, and legal rights; especially the right to vote on matters affecting our future is to lay down our own road map before we jump into any kind of unity resolution with highlanders. After all, what is the rationale for us to join hands with you and jump on your political bandwagon? Is it because it is fashionable to topple Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta only for you to

take over power and maintain the status quo? How sure are we pastoralists that you highlanders will show any different attitudes from that of Afewarki's? Why should we pastoralists go for unification where we remain 2nd class citizens? What stops us from acquiring our freedom to decide on matters that affect our livelihoods? What hinders us from practicing our traditional cultural and religious polity and human values freely? These are serious issues that highlanders must be rationally ready to respond to before they implicitly generalize the existing highland-lowland splits as non-existent.

Conclusive Remarks:

As freedom is free and an inalienable gratis right given to any human being at birth, we pastoralists too are readily determined to regain our birth rights. Indeed, as 'Eritrea is still a nation in the making', the Eritrean highlanders need to come to stipulations with us pastoralists either to make it; or to push us aside in contempt and force us to break it. To this end, there are 3-scenarios open for Eritrean Tigrinya highlanders to consider: (a) done better now belated than never, you need to give away your inherent motto: "Hade-Widib, Hade-Hizbi, Hade-Libi!" and opt for emancipation that may bring you closer to us and become partners in the Eritrean nation making exercise. (b) If this scenario is practically out of question, then you are better off and select side either to link up with your Christian neighbors to whom you are deeply caffeinated by origin and linked by language, culture and religion, within the Tigray and Amharic regions of Ethiopia. (c) If you still find both (a) and (b) scenarios out of touch and taste, then you can still consider continuing to remain detached and left alone till you come to your senses and figure out your own legitimate solutions.

On our part, we are unwavering to join hands with our brethren on the other side of our affinities; and continue to enrich our livelihoods freely and fraternally as we deem them suitable for our communities; just in the same manner as we have been carrying out since time and generations immemorial.



An Olive Branch to now muscular Tigrigna highlanders:

Two Important Births that happened in our midst as Afar People (The Afar Midwifery)

- A) Eritrea (Assab, Dankaliya, Nov 15, 1869)
- B) EPLF (Sidica Ella, Dankaliya, early, 1970)

An Afar account of birth of Eritrea (by Yassin Mohammed Yassin)

Birth of Eritrea:

From the renowned Kingdom of Adal established in Rahayeta, the kingdoms of Dankali and Ankala, the Sultanate of Bidu and other major clan chieftains and sheikdoms successively dominated the traditional administration on the Red Sea coasts, in the interiors and on the islands as well. Since the 16th century, the Ottoman Turks had controlled the Red Sea Afar coastal areas with a minimal influence over the territories. The Ottoman rule transferred its nominal authority over the coasts and islands of the Red Sea to the Egyptian Khedive in 1866 but didn't last long. It was after only three years, on **15 November 1869**, that the Ankala Afar chiefs, **Sultan Ibrahim Ahmed** and **Sultan Hassan Ahmed** signed an agreement with Giuseppe Sapetto, representative of Societa Rubattino Company on the Nasser Majid ship, in which the future Colonia Eritrea was first conceived as the piece of land in Assab possessed by the Italian company. Soon afterwards, on 10 March 1882, the Rubattino company transferred all its landholdings to the Italian government and later, on 5th June 1882, the Italian King Umberto declared the land the **Colonia di Assab** which later grew up to **Colonia Eritrea** after Italian colonists had entered Asmara in 1889 without any notable opposition.

Birth of EPLF (PFDJ):

Soon after the fallout between Afar fighters and ELF in 1967, new movement called the People's Liberation Front (PLF) that later, in the early 1970s became the EPLF. The infant EPLF, mainly dominated by the Christian highlander Tigreans, took advantage of the dispute among the Afar and ELF forces in order to freely mobilize its forces in the Afarland of Eritrea (Dankalia), of course with Afar consent

Sidica Ella in the Dankalia desert is the birthplace of the EPLF. The embryonic and weak EPLF forces were initially camped at Sidiha Ela from where their military power built-up.

As we (Afar and others) have witnessed these unfortunate births, we call it unfortunate not because there was a new birth but what these babies have become; the grievance, the blood shade, tears behind bars, starvation and the exodus, who knew it? Who in the right mind is proud of this? The Highland Tigrigna and other supports of PFDJ would seriously think this is the way to bring up a child? If so ...then we don't ever want to be in this household of injustice and second class citizenship inside or out as opposition.

Amanuel Hidrat In his last article (Nature Abhors Vacuum: Understanding Nature of Competing Values Part-III) in Awate, stated after coming across my article in Aiga, he urged to foster cross-cultural success in modern Eritrea, both political and civic organizational institutions must promote empathy and understanding.

To those of us and many other who share our arguments as lowlands and disenfranchised, that our grievance is worthwhile to listen to, should map our ways forward in a house that is Just, peaceful and equal representation for all, like any civilized 21st century democracy should function, then we would be foolish not graciously accept the olive branch to be involved in an a nation building, National unity, Hade-Widib, Hade-Hizbi, Hade-Libi or Transitional government.