



## IN DEFENCE OF “AWRAJAWNET”

By Samson Redeab  
Wednesday, 08 July 2009 21:36

---

It has been considered, rather, a taboo to speak about awrajas in Eritrea. The “Ghedli” era was shaped by Marxism which in turn abhorred the so called narrow regional affiliation because of its destructive force. At least that was the rationale behind it. But, when you see things now, may be there was a hidden agenda behind that rationale. That era is still dictating contemporary Eritrea’s political discourse on identity.

Once, an Italian by the name Massimo D’Azeglio said “we have made Italy, now we have to make Italians”. Probably, the P.F.D.J. think they have made Eritrea and now they are scheming to make Eritreans. And at the heart of that scheme is the policy of dividing Eritrea into new administrative zones.

If anybody discounts, or doubts the government’s commitment to this agenda, again let me insert Tronvoll’s quote of President Isaias “...The government will not restrain itself from taking appropriate measures regarding those who misinterpret and misconstrue any administrative or developmental policies in order to create religious and regional conflicts(Eritrea Profile,vol.2,no.27Sep.1995). Infact, all the problems that are paralyzing the country are the result of the government’s obsessed approach to achieving that agenda. The paradox of this argument is that, in its history, Eritrea never witnessed a single episode that tested its unity emanating from awrajawnet.

Actually, the opposite will destroy Eritrea. Starting from abolishing Bayto Adi, to changing the blue flag, to destroying historical Awrajas, and many other acts on that queue betray the ideals of our martyrs and render ERTRAWINET meaningless. And this has opened the door for many egos to rush to destroy the re-emerging nation, which probably think, they have not contributed enough on its salvation. The irony is, the day that well researched articles topped the list is dwindling, and any body can re-write history at her or his whims.

Since I have argued that power is the reason behind this destruction of identity, let me try to give a brief opinion how that played in Eritrean politics.

Different powers destroy different identities: Marxists destroyed religions, cultures, and “classes”; dictators destroyed religions, ethnics, and sometimes history of specific segments of the society, in general we can say power destroys identities which come on its way.

## IN DEFENCE OF “AWRAJAWNET”

By Samson Redeab

Wednesday, 08 July 2009 21:36

---

Departing from this premise we can have a cursory look at Eritrean power struggle. Notwithstanding the rancorous debate that Eritrea equally relates to its neighbors, there is ample evidence that it had extensive interaction with Ethiopia. Due to this fact Eritrea is populated by a large group of Ethiopian Eritreans. Unfortunately this group did not get its respectful place in Eritrean society. And my thesis is this group being part of the larger tigrigna /highlander community which had the largest role in defeating the perennial Ethiopian conquests, including the bloody campaigns of the eighties, is at the center of power in today's Eritrea and is trying to change Eritrean landscape.

Though recent developments [news] of forcefully uprooting villages attests to that, this feeling which I have been contemplating for sometime now has been crystallized because of my life in the United States.

I see, everyday, here in the United States, the minority struggle to change the existing social makeup of the country to affirm their citizenship. They try to do this in a democratic setting based on the law of the country. The presidency of Barrack Obama was a milestone in that struggle. As Eritreans and Eritrean Americans, being part of a minority, we are constantly reminded of this fact. And I am sure every Eritrean in the Diaspora experiences this predicament. No matter how much successful you are, you don't get fulfilled with out affirming your identity.

It is right to give minorities equal protection under the law. If you trample the rights of the minorities, it is also evident that you will do so of the majority - Justice is not divisible. So, it follows that the rights of any minority group in Eritrea should also be protected. What I don't see as correct is the systematic rape of a country's history and culture. Everything that goes in Eritrea points to that direction.

As minority, it is rational to harbor a feeling of insecurity, but to work to destroy someone's identity so as to feel secure is criminal.

## IN DEFENCE OF “AWRAJAWNET”

By Samson Redeab

Wednesday, 08 July 2009 21:36

---

A clear example of Eritrean government's disregard of historical Eritrean identity is its convoluted approach towards democracy. It argues that Eritrea needs indigenous democracy, it claims that western democracy inundates and destroys one's culture. Many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have tried indigenous democracy. Some of the ways they used is, putting their religious and ethnic representatives in their democratically elected parliaments. It worked in some, and it didn't in others. The point is all those who advocate indigenous democracy, be it religious or secular governments, are conservatives. Being conservatives, of course not the ideal western conservatism, they want to conserve the identity of the society. This is not so with the Eritrean government.

If we have concurred to the idea that minorities in Eritrea are trying to sabotage the identity of the majority, we can create a system that allays the fears of both the minorities and majorities. The best way to achieve that is by respecting minority rights.

There are some who argue that individual rights are good enough to protect group or minority rights, I respectfully beg to differ. Individual rights, as important as they are, will always protect the majority unless bolstered by minority rights. Recognition and protection of a minority's culture and history are the elemental minority rights. Canada has placed this right elegantly. Here is one of the government's pronouncements: "In the Canadian experience, it has not been enough to protect only universal individual rights. Here, the constitution and ordinary laws also protect other rights accorded to individuals as members of certain communities. This accommodation of both types of rights makes our constitution unique and effects the Canadian value of equality that accommodates difference. The fact that community rights exist alongside individual rights goes to the very heart of what Canada is all about." Canada government, 1991.

And there are those who say identity politics is a recipe for disaster, so we should not bring this into our politics. This is a legitimate concern that should be tackled. If you don't institutionalize identity into government, there is no room for conflict. Separating identity and government is like separating church and state.

So our overriding task should be, to create a unified Eritrea which celebrates its different composition. How do we do that? In my opinion, we should guarantee every possible right, short of secession, to every make up of our society. That is how great nations like USA created a strong nation. So, again, the riddle is how to balance the rights and the limits.

Before I make my final remark, let me pay a tribute to one of our giants who fought for Eritrean

## IN DEFENCE OF “AWRAJAWNET”

By Samson Redeab

Wednesday, 08 July 2009 21:36

---

identity. And one of them who readily comes to mind is, the unforgettable Dr Yassin Aberra. Humble to the bone, he was loved by all his students. He was my teacher for Man power economics and History of economic thought. You can read him at [jeberti.com](http://www.jeberti.com) ( <http://www.jeberti.com/?jbr=an1>

. Some attach or trace his assassination to his strong advocacy of the Jeberti.

Finally, it is not fitting that Eritrean children are not taught the rich history of their ancestry, and worse they are hammered with a history of thirty years war. This history of thirty years war, though befitting on its own, falls much too short to knit us all together. And it is entirely folly to think to create a strong nation while at the same time destroying the history which binds it together. If it were not for our history, there was no need to fight an independence war. We could have, as well, fought alongside the EPRDF to bring a democratic change in Ethiopia. So, in order to reclaim our country and our culture, the first thing we should do is to do away with the new administrative provinces and go back to the historical one; And second, bring "Awrajanet" into a healthy debate of Eritrean politics. It is high time we reclaim our identity, and we shouldn't stand-by idly when our identity is erased malignantly.

Samson Redeab

Washington, DC

07/06/09