



PRESIDENT ISAIAS RECEIVES KENYA'S FOREIGN MINISTER

President Isaias Afwerki yesterday received and held talks with Dr. Amina Mohamed, Kenya's Foreign Minister and candidate for the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

The President underlined the need for the enhancement and

revitalization of the African Union to ensure that the African continent holds its rightful place in the world. President Isaias further emphasized the urgency for both the African Union and the regional organizations (RECs) such as IGAD to get their acts together to advance the widely shared objectives of the

continent's economic integration.

President Isaias and Dr. Amina Mohamed also discussed in detail the status of the bilateral ties between the two sisterly countries. In this regard, President Isaias underscored the need for Kenya to play its due role in the Horn of Africa.

CONTROL OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Impressive achievements are being registered in controlling communicable diseases in the Southern region through the concerted effort of the public, administrations and health centers.

Lauding the effort exerted to this end, Mr. Yemane Haile, Head of the Health Ministry's in the region, explained that over 26,000 impregnated mosquito nets were distributed last year

to prevent the spread of malaria. He further indicated that a vaccination program covering nearly 90% of the region during which over 82,000 children received vaccination against 11 different diseases.

Mr. Franko Kubaba, Director General of Social Services in the region commended the active community participation towards eradicating communicable diseases.



LIVESTOCK VACCINATION IN LAELAI GASH

Over 100 thousand livestock in Laelai Gash sub-zone have been vaccinated against various animal diseases. Mr. Tesfamenkorios Fekadu, representative of animal health in the sub-zone, said that the vaccination was aimed at controlling the prevalence of animal diseases.

He further explained that the success of the program depended on the collaboration of cattle owners and stressed the need for Area administrators to play due role in public awareness raising campaign.

EFFECTIVE FISTULA TREATMENT

The Head of delivery service at Mendefera Referral Hospital, Dr. Habte Hailemeleket, said that following effective Fistula treatment 99% of patients who received treatment have been cured. He made the remarks during a visit by women from four administrative areas of Mendefera to the center.

The head of the NUEW branch in the sub-zone, Ms. Rigbe Bariagabir, indicated that the objective of the visit was to extend moral and material support to women receiving treatment. She pointed out that the main causes of fistula are under-age marriages, FGM, and other harmful practices and called for integrated efforts to avoid such problems.

According to reports, women who visited the centre donated clothes and sanitation materials worth over 30 thousand Nakfa.

NEW YEAR AND CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS



New Year and Christmas were colorfully celebrated with varied cultural shows in Khartoum, Republic of Sudan. The event was jointly organized by the Ministry of Information and the Eritrean Embassy in Sudan.

The celebrations were attended by high-ranking Sudanese government officials, diplomats,



religious leaders, village elders and Eritrean citizens in the country. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Solomon Deres, Chairman of the Eritrean Community in Khartoum, congratulated fellow citizens including members of the Defense Force and explained that the Eritrean community is actively working to uphold and nurture the national values.

Likewise, Mr. Ibrahim Idris, Charge de Affairs at the Eritrean Embassy, explained that the Eritrean community in the country is exerting the necessary effort to bestow the rich Eritrean cultural tradition and heritage to future generations.

The cultural event witnessed performances by renowned Eritrean artists.



Development

Land Grabbing- New Colonialism and How about Eritrea?

Part II

Mela Ghebremedhin

I recently wrote an article for Eritrea Profile on December 28th, 2016, on the issue of land grabbing, discussing whether or not this phenomena could occur in Eritrea versus the current trend happening in most of Africa and also in Asia. Upon publication of the article, I came across several comments on various websites on this issue of land grabbing and, for that reason, I just decided to elaborate a little more on the question of land tenure in Eritrea so as to give a broader understanding on why such land grabbing, at the expense of the people and mostly food security, could not be possible on Eritrean soil in comparison to other African states.

In doing so, this article will give a glimpse at some historical customs and their strengths in terms of land ownership in the country. We will see how colonization, land expropriation and wars hindered traditional land ownership system in Eritrea which will give us an understanding of why modern land-grabbing days likely won't occur in the country.

Indeed, understanding the causality of such phenomena on African soil mainly takes us back to the time of colonization where lands were expropriated from

local communities as well as the establishment of local power at the expense of others, subsequently, creating clans and divisions among the colonized peoples.

As I suggested in my previous paper, land-grabbing in modern day Eritrea won't be possible. Looking back at history, however, Eritrea was not a unique case in that the land was expropriated by foreign powers, invaders or traders such as the Greeks, Ottoman Empire, the Egyptians, followed by European colonialism with the settlement of the Italians prior to the British protectorate, and then Ethiopia's forced annexation.

As Steven Lawry (2016) summarized effectively, the importance of land for the African continent in his research entitled *The Impact of Land Property Rights Interventions*, "Land and natural resources lie at the heart of social, political, and economic life in much of rural Africa. They represent fundamental assets—primary sources of livelihood, nutrition, income, wealth, and employment for African communities—and are a basis for security, status, social identity, and political relations. For many rural people, land and resources such as water, trees, and wildlife also have significant historical, cultural, and spiritual significance."

Lawry's words reflect the symbol of land to Eritreans and as I stressed in my previous article, Eritreans have an emotional and historical attachment to their land and its preservation. Hence, this attachment to the ancestral land takes us back to centuries where different local kingdoms, local authorities and customs were formed over time. Let's look briefly at the context of Eritrea's customs in terms of land tenure.

Some ethnic groups had local authority based on the election of a council of elders such as the Saho ethnic group. While some had a system of caste between serf and master such as the Tigre, or a system of Enda in the highlands mostly populated by the Tigrigna. The Kunama and Nara societies, on their parts, were not divided into serfs and masters but, on the

contrary, matters were decided by discussion while land was owned collectively. Various customary laws existed prior European so-called 'civilization of Africa'.

The enda land tenure system has been influential and was initially made up of a number of families or kinship groups sharing the same ancestor. The members of the enda would receive land, which was provided to the family permanently. Specific plots of land were called *risti* or *meriet risti*, which is defined as "land that is inherited from one's forefathers" and currently under one's possession" (Woldegiorgis, 2015:4).

Within the *risti* system, it was possible to shift from collective to individual ownership (known as *tselmi*) and was seen as a fundamental right within the social construction by featuring three key aspects. Regarding these aspects, Woldegiorgis (2015) explained that they hard to do with "their relative absoluteness, their hereditary nature and their derivation from the historical right of a first possession by someone's remote ancestors".

Meriet worqi (land of gold), another type of *risti* system, consisted of a land bought from an owner for money and wasn't claimed by any enda. Democratically elected elders lead the endas and their duties consisted of collecting taxes and working as judges. With the expansion of the community, the endas became larger and transformed into villages by joining endas together. Following this transformation, the system of enda land tenure system saw the emergence of a *diesa* system and became a collective land ownership.

This customary law of land distribution was clearly and meticulously decided in regards to the level of fertility of the land and ensuring equitable share of the quality of the land among the villagers. Accordingly, the land was measured between "most fertile, medium quality and poor quality" (Woldegiorgis, 2015:5).

Within the *diesa* system, which became the most common system of land ownership, the land was under

the village, owned collectively with inhabitants receiving their shares. The land was under the supervision of an elected village chief. Districts then appeared where district chiefs were also elected. Following these, a system of *gulti* came into play, which was land granted by a ruler and given for specific duties or services and was more of a feudal system of administration of land by royal powers.

The traditional land system was an obstacle to Italian colonizers and as such, from 1893-1941, the colonizer imposed a land policy, giving them rights to seize Eritrea's most fertile lands. Without doubt, this decree led to rebellions such as the one waged by Bahta Hagos but did not stop this legislation to turn Eritrea's land into a "Terra Demaniale" or a "Crown Land" and strengthened in 1909 with the establishment of a second land policy authorizing the designation of territory in the highlands and lowlands as state property.

The Italian colonizers' purpose was to make Eritrea viable and attractive for the emigration of their own citizens. As such, the country must be stable and economically viable to attract Italians to settle. Quickly, industries, agricultural production boomed in Eritrea making it the second most industrialized colony in Africa at that time (with South Africa being first). Without doubt, the exploitation of Eritrean land was not shared by the locals. Even worse, some lands were expropriated from local peasants. Degiyat Bahta Hagos, Abubaker Ahmed, Mohammed Nuri were among those who fought against this expropriation where local inhabitants, who once owned land, became tenants of that same land.

Similarly, under the British protectorate and Ethiopian domination, state land ownership continued at the expense of the Eritrean people. With the coup by Mengistu and its Derg regime in 1974, a new land tenure decree came into play by confiscating lands from churches and aristocrats in the names of the peasants. However, the Derg regime's land policy was fraught with corruption, heavy taxes, and favoritism. Clearly, one can notice that throughout history of Eritrea, the question of land has always been matters of battle while customary land tenure systems kept being completely passed over by foreign powers.

Thus, land-grabbing, at that time, was continually fought by local populations and it became more prominent during the armed struggle. In fact, the EPLF introduced land reform in liberated zones intended to create a more equitable distribution of land. Subsequently, by the late 1980s, a large majority of land reform took into account the *diesa* system in an improved version of it by including the rights of women to land ownership.

At independence, with the growing population and the degradation of the land caused by decades of wars, the question of the land was at the center of discussion by policymakers and a top development concern. This priority was quickly put into practice with the implementation of the Land Law and its proclamations (No. 58/1994 and No. 31/1997) aiming at reforming the land tenure system,

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**ERITREA
PROFILE**

**Published Every
Wednesday & Saturday**

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Amanuel Mesfun**

P.O.Box: 247
Tel: 11-41-14
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E-mail:
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Advertisement: 12-50-13

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OPINION

A Writer's Voyage

Natnael Yebio W.

I am often bored, so much so I am surprisingly eloquent in the subject of my own boredom. But recently I had successfully overcome my boredom with a trip to Gash-Barka and Anseba regions. From visiting dams, a new year's party in Fanko to a city that never sleeps; what a way to cap off the year!

Eritrea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had organized a three day trip to the regions' developmental cities, which are playing a crucial role in the fight to achieve food security in the country.

It is four o'clock on a cold Wednesday morning; I of course was making my way to the meeting point in downtown Asmara. The night was silent, no cars whatsoever on the road, Asmara was quiet like I had never seen before. I contemplated for a bit just to sit in the middle of the road and soak it all in, unfortunately time was against me to indulge in such.

Having arrived at the checkpoint, five white buses were parked outside the Consular Affairs offices, all proudly displaying the national flag in front of their bonnet, baptized with the names Team Fanko, Sawa, Gerset, Alebu, Kerkebet, waiting for the passengers to take their seats. I got to my assigned bus, Team Fanko.

Our journey around the country's biggest region was scheduled to start at exactly 5 in the morning. The Government has been vigorously investing in various water harnessing

mechanisms and climate-smart agriculture. Western low lands agro-industries, including those at Gereset, the two Fankos and the newly constructed one at Kerkebet were our destinations to observe developments on the ground, built in a bid to ensure food security.

Ensuring food security is one of the top national priorities and the cornerstone for sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction strategies in Eritrea. The goal of the food security strategy is to ensure that all Eritreans have a sufficient quantity of acceptable quality food at an affordable price at any time and place within the country. This is to be achieved largely from a combination of increases in domestic food production and importation from abroad, complemented by food assistance to meet the supply gap particularly during emergencies such as severe drought. Food security at the household level is fundamental and this goal will be achieved by raising the incomes and quality of life of the poorest and most food insecure segments of the population. It also entails assisting vulnerable groups establish sustainable means of livelihood to become food secure (e.g. internally displaced people and returnees etc). It is the intention and commitment of the Government to reduce and finally eliminate food insecurity on a sustainable basis.

In a country like Eritrea where there is scarcity of rainfall, it's essential that the Government and the community seek alternative solutions to alleviate water problem. That alternative solution, mainly, is catching every



drop of water through building water catchment schemes and constructing micro- and macro-dams.

These dams and water catchment schemes would not only be confined to supplying the society with the needed water supply, both for them and their animals, but they also have a big role in changing the eco-system in the country and add impetus to other significant development programs such as the development of irrigation farming and thereby ensuring food security.

Eritrea has been, until the Ethiopian occupation, renowned for its agro-industries that have been supplying fruits and vegetables to the Middle East and as far as Europe. The Elebered agro-industry was one of the many agro-industry sites in the country. The agro-industry has been running its agricultural activities not depending only on the natural rainfall; it has been conducted through modern irrigation system. History tells us also the agro-industry has been visited every weekend by many foreign and local tourists, who have been going to enjoy the fresh air and buy fresh agricultural products such as oranges, mangoes, dairy products, wine and vegetables."(National Tourism Association).

The development of resilient

agricultural and agro-industrial sectors is essential for the construction of a sustainable future for developing countries and, more generally, for humanity.

Addressing this challenge requires huge investments to develop the entire value chain in the sector: from improving yields and collection operations on farms to the transportation of products and their distribution in local, regional or international markets, and including activities related to processing and storage (e.g. factories, warehouses, refrigeration, etc.).

To promote sustainable development based on climate-smart agro-based industries, the Eritrean crops, fruits, vegetables and livestock cooperatives have

taken over several agro-industry projects, Kerkebet agro-industry is one of them. With a huge water capacity and hundreds of acres of cultivatable land, the Kerkebet agro-industry has become the largest agro-industry in the Anseba region. Having been tested on a several thousand acres of land, wheat, maize, Taffe and other cereals as well as vegetables for suitability of soil and climate, Kerkebet is expanding into large agro-industry. Drip, splash and other suitable water system are being used. The area is further powered by a power plant with the capacity of 16 megawatt, providing electricity to major agro-industrial areas such as Afhimbol, Gerset as well as Sawa.

Travels to Keren and Akordat,

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Uncovering Veils of Honeymoons

Part II

Semir Seid

We are in busy season of marriages and honeymoons. Last Saturday was the opening night of the marriage season for those who had been eagerly waiting to tie the knot. In the last issue of the Eritrea Profile, I tried to detail the honeymoon procedures of the Saho, Bidawit (Hidareb), the Rashaida and the Nara group's. For this edition, I offer you the enjoyment and more understanding on honeymoons of the other ethnic groups. I welcome you into the second part of uncovering the veils of these glorious post-marriage ceremonies.

The Bilen's with 'Shiki'

The wedding period of this tribe is from December to February. Monday is the special wedding day. After the wedding, the bride is left alone or hidden inside the house. Even the couples don't eat together. Instead, the groom spend his days with his friends; or the bride with the groom's sister or the groom's elder brother's wife (if available).

On the third day, the tradition of *Shiki* is honored. *Shiki* refers to the time when the groom and his friends go to the river and the ladies, without their counterparts' presence, enter the house to visit the bride bringing any two classified types of foods. The mother of the bride sends the food, organizing this for her daughter and the *hamat* (mother of the groom).

If the ladies are from a far-off village, then they can spend the night in the house. If not, they return after entertaining the bride. The *Shiki* ladies continuously perform this activity until the bride returns her home. The best men and friends stay with the groom for nine (typical) or eighteen days (maximum). When the nine days are over, the best man keeps his company with the groom for the next forty days.

The wife returns to her family just at around Easter holiday. Simultaneously, the bride offers the best men a *Mendil* with

perfume on it (a piece of yarn), a bar of soap, a bed sheet and a carpet named *Qilwet*. The best man is the intermediary person who serves the newlywed couple with what they need. He is the trusted nominee. He manages to acquire whatever is necessary for the house from food to materials. He is the accountant. Meal times are done by announcements. The announcer, out loud, addresses

materials in the process. They enter the stranger's house and ask for food, even if the answer is 'No'... they insist on helping the house so they can get something in their hands. They even volunteer to grind cereals for mothers.

The King, Queen, and Servants game goes through the forty days. Everyone who is in the house has a particular duty and a title,

house, not the bride to his. If a mother has ten daughters, then ten of them bring their spouses with them. If she has ten sons, then all of them leave.

Inside the new home, the mother of the bride makes herself hidden to avoid fighting and hatred with the husband of her daughter. She expects *Umhuy*, shaking hands as a peace offering and then also

to ordinary life after. The bride, called an *Ibna* (meaning "new bride"), is has come of age and transitioned into a women.

The post-wedding games played in this ethnic group are vast, one of which calls on one sex to insult the other sex in altered voices. Another game, requires that the groom can't have his wife without the consensus and approval of time limits from the best men and made of honors.

Interestingly, on the first day after the wedding, the bride is made to wear less jewels on her journey to visit him. On the second day, she is allowed to wear all the jewels she possesses.

Kunama, the Workhorses

The Kunama bride spends her honeymoon days in her family's house. The groom serves the family of his wife by herding as their sons do. During summertime, the whole community has a tradition named *Elge Tada*. One day is particularly selected for mass plowing of the newlywed's field. Everyone brings seeds in a material named *Tafara* and sows their section of the field. On some days, the bride is engaged in the plowing activities while wearing her jewels. The groom devotedly and passionately works with everyone until the seeds bloom many months later.

The father of the bride, even if poor, cannot take from the grain silo of the couple but he can feed them both from his own supply. If the groom is approved by the family of the bride. Then he is allowed to stay in their house until three years. Afterwards, a house is built for him with the hand of everyone. The moment any shortages are witnessed, the mother of the bride fulfills it and friends and relatives provide them with plenty of gifts and supplies that can help them sustain on their own.

Anything related to dowry is compensated by the groom's toil after the wedding so each side



the call, hitting the drums and disclosing the menu for the day. This person also tells who can attend the mealtime ceremonies. Only then are they allowed to eat.

The best man is obliged to feed three full spoons to the groom before anyone else touches the porridge. The habit of eating is fast, to the extent that the hotness of the meal is not felt by the people eating which makes it interesting to repeat the meal with same manner. The person who eats much is referred to as *Doqam*. Porridge is the highly selected meal with the best quality butter flowing over it.

When the best men are together with the groom, they walk the streets playing games with each seeking to acquire random

so they know what they are for in the house. *Eshkle* is a type of hit-or-miss game people play by hand. It is played by two people, one hitting and the other trying to make him miss his hand, normally played in the honeymoon days.

The best man's job, before he leaves the couple, is to slaughter a goat. This is on the fortieth day where the groom drops his sword from his back. Plenty of drinks and foods are served during this period.

Afar, the Peculiars

Guests from the groom's side are called *Weredi* and those from the bride's side are called *Kenedi*. Newlyweds, as we have seen in the other groups, are not allowed to interact during daytime. The groom is brought to the bride's

offering money or animals as gifts. If not, she never reveals herself to them again.

After the marriage, the groom returns to his house. Three days later, they hold the *Ibay dobah*, which a ceremony of the grand return. This time, the groom brings new materials with him to the bride's house. At this moment the *Erena* rule has already started. Anyone who fails to greet the bride or groom or anyone who mistakenly walks on the carpets of the house with shoes on suffers the penalty of a cash sum or if they are physically tied up.

For the next forty days (a length of time that common among some groups), the best man and made of honor stay to aid the couple separately. The groom is honored for these days only and gets back

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LOCAL NEWS

GROWING SCHOOL ENROLMENT

In the wake of concerted awareness-raising campaign in Forto-Sawa sub-zone, student school enrollment has marked growth, according to Mr. Mohammed Idris Mohammed, Head of the Education Ministry’s branch office office.

He explained that 20 schools ranging from Kindergarten to Secondary level have been put in place and that integrated effort on the part of stakeholders is required so as to make proper use of the services available.

The Education Ministry’s branch office indicated that the newly built boarding school in Aderset has begun offering service with enrollment of sufficient number of students.

FOCUS ON QUALITY EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Teachers in Karora sub-zone said that parents are playing active role in the teaching-learning process through supporting their children in school activities.

Lauding the endeavors exerted to foster good relations between parents, the community and teachers, the teachers underlined that the achievements registered are the outcome of integrated action taken to achieve set goals.

Over 200 students are attending regular classes ranging from Kindergarten to junior level and 120 students are attending adult education program.

In another report, healthcare service in Karora is making satisfactory progress as regards improvement of community lifestyle in the administrative areas of Arareb, Rihib, Aflag and Hasmet.

The Health Center continues to provide antenatal and neonatal service for pregnant women as well as pediatric and immunization services to children.

TRANSPORT SERVICES: 90% COVERED

Maj. Kubrom Segid, Managing Director of the Central region’s public transportation services, said that 90% of the central region has gained easy access to transportation.

Pointing out that the public transport services company has been exerting efforts to meet an ever increasing transportation demand, Mr. Kubrom said that 80 buses and minibuses are offering services to 27 destinations within the Central region.

Beneficiaries of the transportation services being provided by the company, on their part, called for resumption of services in some parts of the region.

Central region’s Public Transport office currently employs 582 workers and has been offering services with a total of 206 buses in four shifts. The office indicates that it has transported above 42 million people in 2016.

GROWING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Youths in Mendefera sub-zone have expressed readiness to enhance role in the implementation of development programs. They made the pledge during a visit to historical sites and development projects in the Northern Red Sea region. In the course of a visit to Gahtelai Dam, they received briefings by pertinent staff regarding the resource potential in the locality.

Mr. Omar Yehya, Administrator of Gindae sub-zone, gave briefings pertaining to the battles fought in the area and the heroic feats demonstrated by the freedom fighters during the struggle for independence.

The visiting youth pointed out that they have witnessed the ongoing development activities involving the active participation of the public.

Uncovering Veils....

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plays it safe and sound.

For the Kunama, the most of the challenges associated with the wedding come before the wedding rather than after. The days before marriage are hectic and time-consuming. The *Kelete* (elders) gather for a consensus whether to join the couple or not.

It takes much longer time if the houses of the couples are distant. Then *Adara* is a room that is erected right near the bride’s house. In this house, the hospitality to the groom’s guests is exceptional and, at times of marriage, the groom is made to sit with his best men on a white carpet called *Jaba*.

The Tigre, the Firm

This is mine and I am proud to relate about

it. The Tigre ethnic group’s honeymoons and other cultural activities differ as the people are stretched throughout the Gash Barka, Semhar and Sahl and maybe other areas.

In Gash Barka, the Tigre people’s procedures are straightforward and renowned for after the wedding vows whereby the groom and his family return home and don’t see the bride for an entire year. Thus, the honeymoon is celebrated one year later.

In the Semhar and Sahl areas it is a bit different. These areas count for most Tigre people. The tradition of honeymoon is for seven to forty five days. Honeymoon days are named as *Dlalet*. The only food prescribed by the tradition at these days is porridge. Discussions in the house focus on topics of culture and society.

In the meantime, a game committee is selected from the party. The game calls

together a committee of everyone in the honeymooning group and the groom serves as the game judge.

The groom presides over issuing various fun task to others, who may break the rules and be penalized with new orders by the groom. If the participants, one-by-one, follow the judge’s orders well and good, they bring the requested stuffs, including goat, chewing gum etc. If anyone of them fails to comply, they are made to be tied-up outside, alone or with a donkey—a bit harsh I assume, to spend the entire night there. This happens inside the seven days, after that the bride’s relatives and friends come up with a bunch of gifts. This day, the groom is made to get out of the house and spend the day with his friends.

In twenty-one days’ time, there is a second visit to the groom’s house by the ladies. This time, having gifts for the couple, they officially conclude their honeymoon visits. In some traditions of

the Tigre ethnic group, the groom takes his wife and moves to a more distant place so that he can enjoy his privacy.

These summaries of honeymoon affairs, collected from representatives of different ethnic groups, only touches the surface of what actually takes place for each ethnic group. The details are endless. Rather than choosing to travel to fancy spots, which almost everyone seems to fancy nowadays, perhaps trying out more traditional honeymoon ceremonies may be an option for more brave and adventurous individuals.

Beyond this, every culture and ethnic member excitedly enjoys the moments of honeymoons since they hand them a sense of belongingness and identity. These days some of these cultures are changing due to modernization and urbanization, changing people’s mindsets and lifestyles. Still, many are practicing traditional practices today.

Lighter Side

When Boy Meets Girl

Natnael Yebio W.

We are officially well under way into silly season that is expensive weddings. Welcome unnecessary long cued up cars; that break a million and two traffic rules in just two days. Makeup Artists, waking up in the middle of the night to begin with their insurmountable task of making a glorified and adorable monkey look beautiful in her wedding day and her bridesmaids less, grooms wearing white socks with black tuxedo's, inappropriate wedding songs sung by a singer who just happens to have fallen in love with the very bride getting married, love at first sight I guess!

And it all starts when boy meets girl, or is it the other way around, not quite sure these days. Sometimes it is love at first sight, but often it is a cumulative average of daily situations and nightly hesitations.

In traditional Eritrea, however, it is the parents who fall in love with other parents in the village which result in the marriage alliance between the two households, with the boy and the girl forced to consummate the event in the nuptial bed. A sort of a shotgun marriage with the culture and tradition serving as the weapon.

You see, the father of the girl had previously promise the father of the boy that if the child of the former was to be a female, he would offer her to the latter for the sake of cementing the love that existed between them.

But it so happens sometimes that the bridegroom and the bride are so young that for all they know the marriage and the life after the event feels like little children playing house. Only this time they have a real house.

One way or another, once the decision is taken for the marriage to take place, no earthly power can alter it. The marriage usually takes place within a year unless something happens in between. The preparation begins quite ahead of time.

Every preparation calls for songs and dances by the womenfolk. Now it is the time for kneading the dough for making the bread used in making Sewa. So let's dance. Now is the time to brew the Sewa. So let's dance. Now there is nothing much to

do. So let's dance just the same.

Okay, you can sing and dance your hearts contents. But, can't you do it just for yourself. Why use the loudspeaker? If it were only on weekends one could learn to be patient. But starting the orgy ahead of time and with a blaring loudspeaker, it is a bit of incivility, and lack of consideration for those who live in the neighborhood.

There are those who at their peril run out of patience sometimes and feel like going to the site in question and tell them to stop the din. But they hesitate. For the women could take the intervention as an excuse to compose a song at the interrupter's cost and start to dance. In our tradition, women don't take much time to compose insulting songs.

Well, what can you do when people are over joyous? We only live once and we get married once (the real one), and after that, we raise our children and a little while later and we join the dying generation, so let's dance.

The women are happy. In fact, they are the happiest of the crowd. In a society where husbands do not take their spouses to night dances or to simple bars, the approach of a wedding feast is a good tiding for those who had spent their lives cooking, washing and looking after the baby. They dance the night away during the wedding feast before the helpless eyes of their tyrannical husbands.

The mother of the bride or of the bridegroom, depending on the das(Tent) is going around and inquiring about the mood of the people. Are they happy? Do they want more bread or drinks? Anything missing?

To do this small job, the mother is in her Sunday best, bedecked with jewels and her newly plaited hair shining like silver strands.

Any family feast is a day of liberation for our mothers. O how sad they become once the ululating and clamor that accompanies the wedding feast ceases and they have to return to the habitual household toil and drudgery. Wait until I have the youngest son married, sighs the mother.



Now the boy has become a man, a husband, a breadwinner. He will leave his mother and will be with his wife. And the girl has now become a woman and a wife with strict instructions to serve and please her husband.

The lucky lover will of course live happily ever after. As for those whose marital ship was ignored for one reason or another, they can also live happily ever after, separately.

Some marriages end up in comedy, others in tragedy. But they have to be celebrated whatever the result might be. The month of Tiri (January) is traditionally consecrated for marriages and wedding feasts. A matting season par excellence. Count nine months after January or even February, and that's, more often than not, when Orthodox Eritrean's celebrate their birthdays, namely September and October. So if you forget the birthday of your close friend or even your wife, choose these months (give or take a week) and check and confirm with a relative to buy your present. You won't go wrong.

If it were not for the lent, wedding feasts would have rolled on the whole year through and there wouldn't be any power to stop them.

"It is the happiest day of my life" says the bridegroom. And this unchained happiness cost a lot to the bride-groom and the family alike. The poor have to borrow. While the rich overdo it. The bride-to-be asks the sun and the moon. That's what the bride-groom in his moments of amorous ecstasy had promised her.

"You just name it, I will buy it,"

he says.

"Honey, I will not go to church without a limousine," warns the capricious bride.

Now it is reported that even village girls are asking for bands to play their wedding feasts. Some families prefer to organize the feast in very expensive restaurants. They pay a fortune to please their child or to simply just show off. But no amount of money or abundance of food can save marriages from breaking down if the love between the spouses lacks sincerity also.

I have seen a bride-groom

putting his new bride literally on a pedestal and kissing her feet. People applauded, she wept with joy. Hardly had a year passed than the marriage screeched to a sudden halt. It was a kiss of betrayal as was manifested during the heated argument over alimony in the court.

But with all this fanfare and clamor, there is something that keeps the bride worrying all through the marriage ceremony and the subsequent feast.

"Darling, says the bride-to-be. "Was there someone else in your life?"

Trouble in Paradise!

Land Grabbing- New Colonialism...

Continued from page 2

land productivity, conservation and food security. For instance, the new Land Law gives equal rights to all citizens to diesa land and in terms of "leaseholds for housing, commercial and other social services; the lease period may vary from 10-60 years" (Proclamation No.58/1994).

After years and years of lessons learned in terms of land ownership, expropriation or the modern term of 'grabbing' has been at the expense of the people. Hence, after decades of struggle, the question of land and its symbol to Eritrea cannot be denied. Henceforth, the Land Department of the Ministry

of Land, Water and Environment (MLWE) has the heavy duty of ensuring the "implementation of sustainable land management and guarantee optimum use and fair distribution of land" (MLWE).

As such, the current trend of land-grabbing, a new type of colonialism, that African people are victims of, is unlikely to happen in today's Eritrea after such long battles and wars to re-appropriate rights to land. The combination of customary land tenure such as the diesa system combined with the need of a land management system to ensure agriculture, food security and protecting of the environment are top priorities and paths to sustainable development of the country.

Photographers Corner

*Photo: Tazaz Abrha
Gerset Agricultural Project
2013*



A Writer's ...

Continued from page 3

breakfast in Aderde and lunch in Kerkebet was all in a day's travels for the Ministry's members, all culminating in our arrival at the massive Kerkebet dam and its agro-industry plantations at around 15:30. Having witnessed the developmental area, we set off to Sawa for the night. For me this was the first time I was returning to Sawa after I had completed my national service back in 2009. And what a change six years can make. Though it was eight in the evening when we arrived in Sawa, I couldn't help but succumb to awe in all the positive changes Sawa had undergone in six short years. It was impressive.

After a long day in the road, we were treated graciously by our hosts to a delicious banquet. The next morning, we commenced

travels, once again, at five in the morning, this time a visit to Alebu Innovation Centre, Gerset dam and a night at Fanko were on the itinerary.

After having breakfast in Haikota and visiting the Alebu Innovation Center as well as the canned Tomato processing company, we finally reached Gerset. Filled up to its borders, the Gerset Dam seems to be the venue of convention for the trees and animals in the area, while the vast land across it has gone beyond providing the fruits of its soil, we were told, the Gerset agro-industry had three different dams that supply the farm with a capacity of 65 million cubic meters of water. Gerset has been a functioning farm for several years with different kinds of cereal crops, vegetables, sugarcane, cotton and fruits. Gerset is cultivated with orange, lemon, mango, papaya

and palm trees that have started to yield date and citrus fruits. It also has a cattle ranch where over ten thousand sheep and goats are nourished and housed in Gerset. This is a clear sign of Gerset's critical contribution towards promoting rich biodiversity. Furthermore, Gerset agro-industries are reported to have opened employment opportunities for 4,000 local residents.

Afterwards, we held a luncheon consisting of spicy and aromatic herbs, a variety of vegetable dishes and capreto (goat meat) eaten communally in the gardens of the Gerset agricultural vista. We settled our famished stomachs and made our way to Fanko electric power plant, where a night dinner with some downtime to catch up on the last two days of our journey around the region dominated the discussion at the

dinner table. The New Year was just two days away and this was the time to have fun and that we did. In the wilderness of Fanko, work suits were traded for shorts and shirts and the night was danced away.

Our last day on the road saw us drive to Teseney, one of the country's commercial city's where we witnessed firsthand the busy markets around the city and the four-star hotel Costina. What a town Teseney is becoming, now with 24/7 electricity being provided for the city from the Fanko power plant, the town is in some ways becoming, dare I say it, "a city that never sleeps."

By approximately noon, we were leaving Teseney in our rearview as we moved along long serene roads that led us to Barentu for a lunch hosted by the Commander of the Western

Front, Brig. General Teckle Kiflai. Afterwards, just like in Teseney, we were parting with Barentu in our memories, making our journey back to our capital. A long trip awaited us.

By the end of it all, we became lowlanders, Keren, Hagaz, Aderde, Akordat, Kerkebet, Sawa, Haikota, Alebu, Gerset, Fanko, Barentu all in just three days. For the travelers it was a time to bond as colleagues, as members of one of the most important ministries in the country. It was a pleasure to witness the laudable development efforts being made by the government and citizens. As a citizen, it was comforting to see that the country was making strides in all the right directions and for me, personally as a writer, it was a dream come true to take this voyage across the biggest region in the country.



Go Michael!

Billion Temesghen

The things that make the Eritrean people exceptional are endless, but one that astonishes me in particular, is the fact that when an Eritrean does something big and important we all feel extremely proud, as if we actually rolled our sleeves, got our hands dirty and sweated ourselves. Trust me, big or small, 'square' or not, our pompoms are always ready to tassel wildly from where ever part of the world we are in. Needless to say we are our very own everlasting cheerleaders.

Thus, when we heard about a ground-breaking invention, a device that makes square holes within few seconds, by one of our very own, we only naturally say "hats off lads, it has 'Eritrean' as a tag!"

After bearing three patents towards the end of last year, the very first square hole-cutter device in the world, will be out in international markets by as soon as the mid of 2017. It is actually already making a racket in the building trade worldwide.

"This is simply the start, I have been working on more" he says promising that he has more pioneering invention for the very near future; we have Eritrean engineer and inventor Michael Sebhatsu with us. Hats off lads!

Thank you so much for making time. So, QUADSAW, how did it start?

QUADSAW is now a company that I co-own. But it all started in the late 1990s, on an ordinary day of work in kitchen designing, I saw a colleague slashing out holes for some power outlets. I noticed how it took him tons of time to measure and cut a square hole. I asked him why wouldn't he be using a square hole-cutter, he told me to get him one and he'd pay me double.

I really did not know that there was no such a thing—it never existed.

Thank God I shifted from designing to fitting. I should be grateful the office policy annoyed me when I had to stay closed in a room for hours of kitchen designing.

Afterwards I looked around to see if such a thing never existed, I went to the patent office and made sure there was none. And ever since then I could not stop thinking and rethinking about a square hole-cutter. It took me every day trials of many years to finally come up with this devise that would practically save builders tons of time; it cuts a square hole in 10 seconds.

The Costa Coffee enlightenment

Day in and out, I kept thinking of how to come up with a device that can actually cut a square hole. And then one day I was getting my coffee in a Costa Coffee shop on High Street Kensington, and a light bulb light in my head, "Aha!" I said, and sketched my idea on a napkin.

I thought of attaching a lateral motion drill, driving four blades set in a rectangle. Apparently, it worked.

Did you always want to be an engineer?

Yes, you can say that. Engineering is something I have always wanted since I was a child. I was born in Adi Golgol, where my family runs a farm. I was impressed by all of the farming tools and machineries we used in our farm. What impressed me the most though was when mechanic workers would come to do maintenance services to the machineries. You know, how they'd spread their fabric on the ground and lay on the spare parts and all, which is something that I enjoyed watching as a kid. The sun rays would hit the metal to eventually make them dazzling. It was a vivid

memory.

It's since then that I wanted to seriously get to know mechanics.

Young Mike

I told my father I wanted to study. I told him I wanted to know how planes flew without moving their wings; I had so many curiosities. My father answered me saying, "Engineers would know". Also, I was good at spotting problems and enthusiastic to at least try to look for solutions.

However, when I asked my father to send me to school, he was hesitant. To a farmer, losing a boy would mean a loss of profits, one less man to help. So he convinced me to stay for a year and eventually sent me to Asmara when I turned 11.

I started elementary school way too late for my age, but perhaps it was because I wanted to learn, I eventually always would make it to the top of my class and skipped one grade every semester. In about three years, I finally sat in class with student my own age.

In Addis Ababa

My older brother ran a metal workshop in Addis Ababa so I went to work with him when I was in the 6th grade. I was working and taking vocational courses at the same time. However, I was not content since all I wanted to do was study engineering.

Nevertheless, I was good at comprehending how the machines in my brother's workshop functioned since I spent a lot of time trying to figure out and understand how to handle them. In fact, almost in no time, from an errand boy, I ended up supervising several machines on my

own.

Why did you leave Ethiopia?

The government of then issued a law whereby young Eritrean would be forcefully deployed in the Ethiopian army and fight against Eritrean freedom fighters. It came as a shock to many young Eritrean men who were studying or working in Ethiopia.

Of course, we had to leave. Many young men escaped from Ethiopia, joined our Eritrean freedom fighter brothers and sisters. As for myself, however, I escaped to Kenya in 1988 and stayed there for almost a year.

After a very long journey from Africa and around Europe, I made my way to England and decided to stay. I arrived on the 15th of September 1990 and started school on the 1st of October.

And then finally you were able to study engineering, just like you had hoped since you were young.

Not quite as fast but yes. I first had to go to college and then to university for mechanical engineering. I graduated in 1996. I went on to do my masters in product design at London South Bank University. Living away from home was not easy. I had to work to support myself. I had to do all sorts of jobs and even drove a minicab at the time, but then again, I never even once let loose of that original dream of studying engineering.

Now what?

Ean Brown, my partner, started a company called Genius IP to commercialize new patents and QUADSAW became his first



product. We are working on making the product more efficient and an easy gadget to handle. It is being manufactured in UK, although, the blades are being delivered to us from a renewed company in Germany.

Currently we are working to produce enough to satisfy demands which we're getting from Australia, Asia, Europe and the USA. And then after, maybe in a year or so, we will advance to automated production.

What about you, will we see more inventions?

I hope so! This is just the beginning. There, is in fact, one new thing that I have been working on lately.

Best of luck to you!

Thank you.

