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How Many Months Will It Take The Eritrean Government To Attack the Obama Administration?

- > than 1 but < than 3 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 to 9 months
- a year
- there will be no attack.

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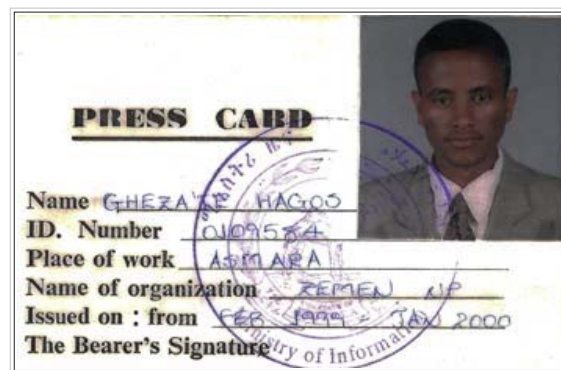


The Kind Citizen and 'Zemen'

Awate - The Kind Citizen  
By Ghezae Hagos Berhe - Jun 18, 2009

I am launching a column in this venerable website, Awate.com. The column's name is 'the kind citizen.' I choose this name because that is my vision for Eritrea, a nation of kind citizens. Citizens who pride in their histories and identities, who know and exercise their rights and duties (mainly rights in these times) and citizens who are kind to themselves and to each other. In today's Eritrea, we need these kind citizens, and I dedicate this column for them.

Kindness ('Lew-Hat') is the character and name I cherish most. And here is why: LIFE is too, too short. "Hello, babies. Welcome to Earth. It's hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It's round and wet and crowded. At the outside, babies, you've got about a hundred years here. There's only one rule that I know of, babies—God damn it, you've got to be kind."- Kurt Vonnegut



I was a private press journalist in Eritrea from 1998-2001, for 'Zemen'. I want to keep alive the spirit of freedom of press, freedom of self. I hope this column will be my niche to post different articles, essays, chats, reviews. Through this column, I hope I will be able to share with fellow Eritreans my views, my fears, my hopes, my desires, my life.

In this installment, I am honored to remember one of the proudest moments, my experiences with Zemen newspaper along with one of my friend and colleague, Amanuel Asrat, Editor-in-Chief of Zemen newspaper; imprisoned since September 2001.

I believe in Eritrea. I believe in Eritreans. I believe we will see better days. I believe the God of fathers and mothers, the God of our land will not abandon us. I believe we have gone through a lot in our history, our present to simply fade away in the future. I believe in Ibrahim Sultan and Welwel and their sons and daughters. I believe in the fertile womb of Eritrea to give birth to more kind citizens. I believe in the forces of justice, tireless advocates, writers, bloggers, webmasters -AAA, the chargers of our battery, our sleeping conscience, Asmarino, Awate, Assena). (Incidentally, I wish success to the historic event, the EGS's peaceful demonstration in Washington on 19 June 2009, 'Yes YIAKL'.) I believe in the Phoenix nation.

"Phoenix tale is a myth. A bird burned down, with its nest, to ashes and get to rise again fresh and beautiful, for another one thousand years is sure exiting fantasy disposed to be told by an elder to awed kids studded across camp fire. Phoenix bird may exist in the wild imagination of philologists and mythologists. Phoenix nation- a nation that rises up from ashes of history- yes, fresh and beautiful for another long life- undoubtedly exists in the minds and hearts 4.5 million of Eritreans. I believe we shall rise. Again."

\*\*\*\*\*

Ade Hanti Koyana Wulada Enashaqelet  
Bk'a Kem'tom Azmad ArbaEte HamuShte M'konet!--Amanuel Asrat.,  
Mother being just one makes her children anxious  
If only there were four or five of her, like the relatives!

I have a wallet. Its denizens have changed overtime. Sometimes, it buffs up like George Costanaza's; sometime it slims down to few credit cards and Ids. I trim it regularly. Yes, many items move in and out. Even come to think of it, the wallet itself has changed in the past ten years. Still, one card remained the veteran. I kept it in my wallet for ten years. The constant. The talisman. The memory. The promise.



THE ACCUSED  
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It is my press card.

### Amanuel Asrat... 'Nay Ne' Snet FiQri Aytresieya!'



I invite the reader to recite slowly and mull over the quote. *Ade Hanti Koyna Wulada Enashaqolet/ Bk'a Kem'tom Azmad ArbaEte Hamushte M'konet!*

I read it in Asha-golgol (around 15-20 kms from Asmara) where Amanuel Asrat was stationed as a member of Eritrean Defense Forces in Spring and Summer 1999. I went there to visit him and others I befriended though him. I read the quote and other one liners in his small room. I was touched, deeply. I said that it beautifully, poignantly revealed the incomparable love Eritreans had to their mothers. He was surprised, pleasantly. Through a protruded smile, may be a smoke too, he said, '*Chhidd!! FeTikaya...SaQt EQua Iye TsiHifeya.*' I repeated it was one of the sweetest lines I ever read in Tigrigna. So I always recite the lines to whoever wants to listen about Amanuel Asrat. '*Ade Hanti Koyna...*' I remember him. I remember his mother. His sisters (*Misgana, Rahiel*). His father (*Aboy Asrat*.) Then I shudder with fury, with desperation, with anger...with promise. That year, 1999, was the zenith of our friendship...but the kindred sprit started earlier. Way earlier.

I don't distinctly remember but it must be around summer 1993 we made the first acquaintances. We were both Asmara University students; Him in Soil Science, me in Law. Slowly, yet surely, our friendship, rooted in the soil of arts/ bohemianism, grew. Not only our deeper interests but also our personality meshed well. Incidentally (may be not), we were from a neighboring '*Gezawti*'. Him, from *MedeShto/ MaeKelay Sefer*, Me, from my beloved, *Edagahamus*. We both related with the everyday dramas and bohemian dusts of the meanest and the most unforgettable streets of Asmara, the legendary Abashawel.

Reminds me of the huge underground classic of the 1990s (one of the best albums of the decade) the sleeper-hit of Abraham Bayre, Wedi-Bayre of Hadish-Adi (Zoba Qaza). *AseAt weSta Baburey DeGiga/ Tet'e Nab Shawely tiShreb MeriSa*. He crooned in his one of his songs "AIMaz ile ALoku."

*GeZana Villagio GueZena nab AkrYa*  
*Nay NieSnet FiQri Aytresieya*  
*Eta MeRiet xeDfi ZiteXawtNLa*  
*Ab moNgo FikRiKum Zekurini iLa ALa*

Frequently called by "Wedi-Asrat," Amaneul was a fine young man with great artistic potential. He was a very popular in his days at Asmara University and out for his humor, intelligence, personality and social graces. He was the first student I met who was writing on campus life. I still remember him reading his poem on one of the most lovable figures of Asmara University, '*Hiwota*,' the woman janitor.

After we secured our friendship, we used to chat endlessly about arts, writers, themes, personals, and pure nothings. Like budding writers, we showed each other our works. Though he complemented on my English poems, he clipped my Tigrigna ones. After I asked his opinion of my poems on "*Barya's*" death, I remember his gracious suggestion that I don't have the "IT" to write poems. I believed him. Because, he wrote spectacular poems and he honed his style with great passion for the language and love for his craft. I will deal with Amanuel's poems and other works at other occasion.

### BeALu Girma and Delalaw

Naturally, we discussed, debated, agreed, and disagreed on the literature of the time, favorite books, articles, and authors. It was the general consensus of the younger artists of that time that the 'Mieda' culture had stunted the Eritrean literature. '*Tegadelti*' authors were unable to distinguish between objective writing and subjective politicking. As a result, you find in all '*Tegadelti*' fictions, this '*Tegadelay*' character predictably boring, one-dimensional, John Wayne, robotic. Many writers, especially, Solomon Dirar (the worst author and person ever in my book) and Samuel G/hiwot (AkaAka) fell in this group. As a pure talent, Alemseghed Tesfai leads the pack. Michael Berhe was consistent in his short stories, Like "*Fetaw SeAt*." I liked the artist/ writer Micheal Adonai's "*Kltemerakib*." Amanuel liked the poets. Issayas Tsegay and Beyene Haile Mariam were his favorite poets.

In search of deeper inspiration and talents, we looked across the horizon, across the border. Ethiopia hosted brilliant fiction writers whom I had been reading faithfully and hungrily for ages. Who in my generation have not read or heard of

\*Contribute\*



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"Sememen?" by Sisay Nigussu: a love story of Abel and Tigist in Addis University. I guess that book pushed even mediocre high school students to pull an all-nighter in the hope of joining the University and fall in love with a version of "TiGist" as a freshman.

But still, the great *BeAlu Girma* dominated every discussion I had with Amanuel and other friends. In his short life, BeAlu has penned wonderful books like 'Haddis', 'Ye-key kokeb Tri', 'Oromay', 'Kadmas-Bashager' and his finest 'Derasiw.' The latter was thinly veiled biography of another great Ethiopian man of letters, Sibhat Ghebregziabhier. I still can conjure up the characters of his books, like Tsegay Ghebremedihn of 'Oromai' and Sirak of 'Derasiw.'

Amanuel loved more essays and commentaries of the newspapers. I remember how he much loved Professor Mesfin's (the essayist, not the activist) long poem on "Ye Lijuagered FeteNa". It was about a serial dater who sat for an exam and all she can remember was the names of the "wendoch" she dated. Most of all, Amanuel was entranced by the famous Ethiopian newspaper, "The Reporter", and especially, the column one can arguably say brought the readers' perpetual interest to that newspaper. Of course, I am talking about the column, "DELALAW", *Amberber Mentenot*. The pen-name with his brilliant descriptions, satirical but still unique observations of social life, captivated Amanuel. "Delalaw" fuelled his imaginations and his dreams.

At that time, we were both contributing articles to then existing papers. He wrote heavily for "Tirigta" which was published by NUEY (Hamama'T'e). I remember a few, like on Yemane Mekonen (Lilo)'s Adulis on Pushkin's Eritrean-Debarwan ancestry. I also remember one at *Tsigenay*. I liked that article. It admonishes us for forgetting the tenth anniversary of "Afabet" victory over "Nadew-Ez." The event (March 17, 1998) passed without any sort of celebration or even mention. I argued that it was the greatest victory that changed the course of our armed struggle and we should have honored it. The fact that Massawa's 'Fenkil' was garnering all the attention each and every year has got to do more with the bathing suit and extra cash the national tourists were taking along with them than with the actual importance of the victory itself. Afabet, being situated in far outpost from the glitter, was fading, sadly.

I was also sending few articles to *Haddas Eritrea*. They published one after an unrecognizable edit. It was some sort of exposition or extended treatise of a few verses of the Polish poet, Wislawa Szymborska. **The art of writing/ the powers of preserving/ revenge of mortal hand.** What art/literature really means. I remember including, my Russian favorites, like Tolstoy's, or rather his hands as described by Aleksey Peshkov, rather Maxim Gorky in his reminiscence of Tolstoy and Antoine Chekhov. **Revenge of mortal hand...**Isn't that still true?

#### Zemen more than a newspaper

It was sometime around 1997, Amanuel popped the idea, disguised in a question. "**Why don't we start our own newspaper?**" It was the long-anticipated wish. The dream that we both had for our own newspaper took some time to materialize. We had to pass through phases of ephemeral alliances with other colleagues and financial bumps. I teamed up with my university colleagues, with the one and only Milikias Yohannes, the dearly missed Medda "Medhaine Haile", Yosief Alazar and Habeteab Yemane (all law graduates) to start *Kestedemena*, around November 1998. After a brief stay there, I finally joined him *Amaunel Asrat*, *Amanuel Elias*, *Tesfazghi Oqbazghi* and later *Yosief Berhe (Josi)* to start "Zemen", in January 1999. We were issued with a press card that I still have it in my wallet. I remember I felt more pride and joy in flashing that press card than the law faculty staff card which was more prestigious and harder to obtain.

I really can't very much process and rewrite here my experiences in "Zemen." Simply put, it was the most gratifying period I had ever had. Zemen was not merely a print media for us. **It was our dear home. Zemen was a place. It was where we felt safe, witty, true, free. Zemen was a time. It was when we knew we were 'in the zone.'** **It was when time stood still. Zemen was an opportunity. It was what we were waiting for to curve our little statutes from our imaginations, desires, fears.**

**Zemen was people. How can I remember Zemen without our dear mutual friends? Friends who encouraged us and walked the walk. Wedi Asrat, Wedi Elias, Wedi Adie, Fagi, Memhrey, Jossi, RaEsu, the lone distributor Akllilu, Zewintana (Wintana editors, Aziz, and Dawit), Simon, Dani, Woldu, the iconic Lancha, Peter, Leake, Enda-Minassie Computer Center, Meron, R-ghede, Saba, Efreem wedi Khuwada, Duba, Seife, Bizen (Samu), Yoni (Wedi Zekarias), Gorgorios (Bini). Zemen was indivisible part of the close-knit family, the family of Eritrean journalists. We worked closely with Kestedemana friends (Milikias, Medda Haile, Yosief) Admas editors (Khaled,**

*Haileab, Yonas), Tsigenay (Meles Nigusse, Akhedir, Omar, Zemenfes, Yusuf) Meqalih (somehow my favorite newspaper, with Matchu-Mathewos, Dawit Wedi-member, Yebio wedi Gerie), Setit (Aron, Simret, Dawit, and Joshua). Zemen was people. Zemen was our dear home.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Ag'Do Nieyratni Ag'Do nay Beyneye  
Shibo Nieyratni shibo nay Beyneye  
Eidom AyseAnu WeSidomuleye—Ato AtweBr'Han Segid

I have a wallet. Its denizens have changed overtime. Still, one card remained the veteran. I kept in my wallet for ten years. The constant. The talisman. The accuser. The reminder. The guilt. The memory.....The Promise.

It is my press card.

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