

# **Is Tigray a Friend or a Threat to Neighboring Afar in Ethiopia?**

Their Cause of the Conflict and its Consequences

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## **I. An Overview**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The political history of Ethiopia in general and that of the Afar relation with Tigray has been one of the longest ones. They have the longest geographic border in the country, though this is not known beyond its immediate area. This article aims to describe and analyze the relation through chronological development from the past to the present. The historical part starts from the geographic settlement to the ancient relation of the time. However, things changed since the period known as "The Era of the Princes" and new leaders in Tigray, like Mikael Sehul and Emperor Yohannes IV.

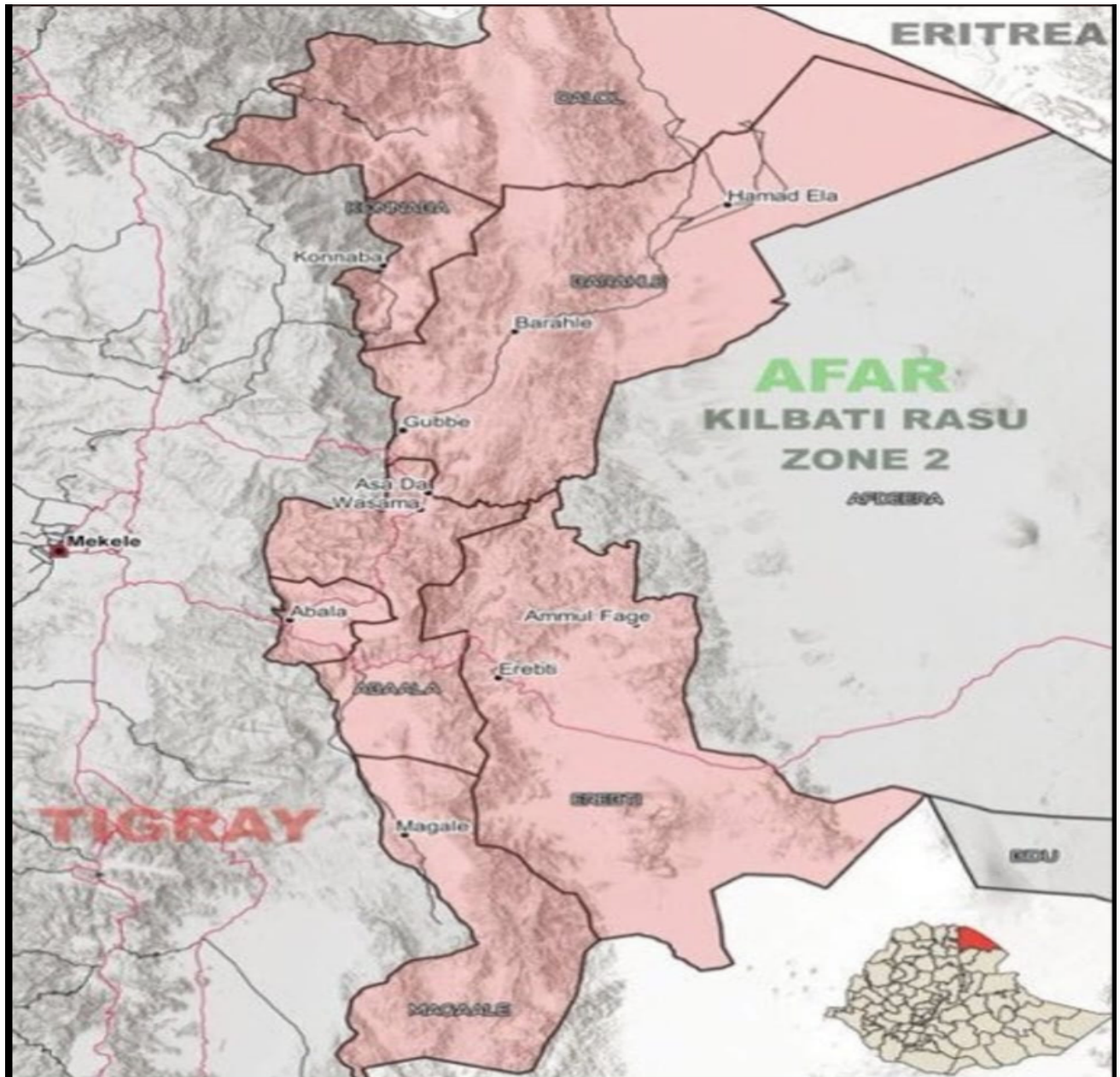
The political development continued as Emperor Yohannes was killed in March 1889 by Sudanese Mahdists defending his country. After his death, Emperor Menelik took over the governorship of Ethiopia and Yohannes's heritage-maintained power at the provincial level of Tigray. The provincial rule of the family of Tigray included the northern Afar in its local administration. This provincial rule was kept until the military government took over its administration framework of the country, though heritage rule declined since the revolution in 1974 in Ethiopia.

In the 1980th, a new political force emerged, known as woyane, as did the Afar political struggle. The former carried on an armed struggle for 17 years and took over power in Addis Ababa, whereas the Afar struggle became subject to disbursement and subjugation. However, a federal system of decentralization was introduced and stayed there for about 27 years with a complete domination of the woyane-led government. In 2018, the woyane was ousted from their rule through a popular uprising and replaced by a new reform government led by Abiy Ahmed. As it lost power in Addis Ababa, the woyane withdrew to their region of Tigray and reorganized its ability to fight the central government and dictate its terms to the central government. Due to this conflict, the situation seems to return to civil war between the central government and woyane in general and later the Afar and the Woyane in particular.

### **1.2 The Land and the People**

The geographic position between the Afar and the Tigrayan has been defined since the immemorial period of the past, in which the Tigrayans generally inhabited the highland plateau. In contrast, the lowland belongs to the Afars though it pushes each group in some areas. In modern times, the definition of the territories was made arbitrarily into the Agame, Kilde, Awlaelo, and Wajirat sub-provinces until it was changed by the federal arrangement of Ethiopia, where every national group ascertained its regional governments. During the decentralization rule, the Afar Region did not include all those parts of the area that remained in Tigray. No one dared to raise the issue by then except the Sawune people, who complained to the central government without any solution.

### 1.3 A Map of the boundaries affected by the Woyane Invasion





#### **1.4 The Resource of the Northern Afar**

The resource question is critical in the relation between the Tigrayans and the Afars. In the past, the details known were related to the availability of salt and potash minerals of the northern Afar. This was initially known among the caravan traders who used to fetch these minerals from As-Ale to Mekele and up to Raya beyond in the remote past. With the formation of modern Ethiopia and the establishment of the local administration, the Northern Afar remained under the administration of Tigre, as then it was known. This provincial administration saw that Afar was incorporated under the Tigray administration, where Afar administration was placed under Mekele and other towns, where the local government consequently checked their progress. The administration was relatively nominal, which meant it was placed far away to influence the remote Afar areas directly. The Tigray provincial administration was to open up the region through a road network and the imposition of taxes on the animal and the salt trade. The salt was used as a barter economy where the transaction was paid.

The As-Ale Salt and the Tigrayan need for expansion: Thus, the Tigrayan and the Afar boundaries had to be defined. This was done long before any boundaries ever existed in the area. During this time, one source of conflict was the Afar Salt mine of As-Ale in Dallol, which was the only source of a commodity in the Northern region of Ethiopia. With this resource in mind, expansion desires grew simultaneously to become a political agenda. Historically Tigrayan leaders envisaged control of the Salt mines areas. The first major known clash was observed in the 1760s when the Tigrayan lord Mikael Sehul carried out regular raids and was later consolidated by Emperor Yohannes IV.

During the armed struggle years of the Woyane, it was proved that the Afar resource had more potential than anybody else knew; because of this, the woyane happened to discover what they never had seen before and confirmed their territorial ambition. As woyane came to power in Addis Ababa in 1991, it was clear to them that they saw the resource potential as attractive, even as they ruled the country and had to exploit it by any means. They did it without any obstacle as their watchful administrators held all the Afar local government positions. This was clearly seen as the woyane withdrew from their government position in Addis Ababa for good and had to fight to the end to regain the opportunities.

## **II. Historical Background**

For the sake of brevity, this article tried to summarize the subject matter into the Afar -Tigrayan relation into the two past periods: the remote past and the other as the modern period. The record for the distant past is very much limited. Therefore, I tried to draw on local oral tradition for information that might be relevant. The modern time describes the transitional period of power struggle in the country in relation to the Afar and Tigrayan connection.

### **2.1 Relations under Ancient Rules**

The most available records are traced during the Axum civilization, where Adulis port town on the Red Sea facilitated contact with the outside world. Adulis was the only known point that provided communication links with the Axum civilization. The Afar is said to have facilitated the transport through camel caravans and kept the security of the passage to and from Adulis to Axum. I may believe that Afar was among significant communities in Axum; even some of those places that remained in Axum are named Afar language by definition.

The other incident of history about Tigrayans relation could be said that of the Negash history. This history describes the prophet Mohammed as having a problem with non-Muslims in the Arab community. In Macca, he decided to send his followers as a delegate to King Al Nagash of Habesha, now situated in Tigray. The delegate crossed the Red Sea to the Afar port of Zula and, went on foot through Kululi, Konaba, and reached Al Negashi. I believe the area was then resided by the Afar until they were pushed by the modernization of the road network and urbanization by the growing Tigrayan power. Throughout history, the Afar has been known for their contact across the Red Sea, imported and exporting goods from the outside world, and transporting them to the highland, which used to be valuable in the plateau and beyond. At the same time, commercial links have been vital through socio-economic interaction that exists to this day.

### **2.2 The Period of Power Struggle**

Apart from the Axum civilization, the Tigrayan was no better off than the Afar to dominate other neighboring regions. As the civilization of Axum declined in the fourth century, they had to find alternative ways to drive their politics. I call this period a struggle for power among the protagonists. The period is also known as "The Era of the Princes," when every area chief was needed to show his power by expanding his power base. This was first noticed in Tigray by Mikael Sehul, who expanded into Afar, occasionally swapping plenty of livestock and salt resources. The other head who struggled to terminate the country's anarchy was Emperor Tedros. Parallellly, there was a Tigrayan Ras Kassa who dominated the political scene of Tigray.

The Escape of Ras Kassa to Afar to Struggle: The escape of Ras Kassa to Afar was made when the power struggle was intensified in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, the power of Emperor Tewdros was growing and intended to enhance the unity and modernization of Ethiopia. He united the army of Ethiopia on the modern ground and tried to integrate his political power by incorporating the different kings around. In this effort, the question came to Tigray, like other regions, to lose control to Emperor Tedros. Ras Kassa held power in Tigray, who was to submit himself to Tedros. Considering his relation with the Tigrayan people and the growing Emperor Tedros power, he

instead fled to the Yakumi, an Afar chief of Abala. For the first time, the Afar contact became significant in the relationship with Tigrean, which allowed the interaction in the politics of the whole of Ethiopia. At besieged by a British expeditionary force, Emperor Tedros decided to commit suicide than be captured at Makdala in 1868. Ras Kassa of Tigray exploited the power vacuum, which allowed him to become the Emperor of Ethiopia.

### **III. Relations Under the Rules of the Emperors**

Under different imperial rules of Ethiopia, the Tigrayan and the Afars continued to live side by side. Hence, part of the northern Afar was included in Tigrayan provincial administration. The first Tigrayan leader to trigger a war against the Afar was Mikael Sehul, and continued by Emperor Yohannes IV, who tried to unite Ethiopians through Christianity. Hence, his political role was associated with a conflict against the Muslims in the country. After the death of the emperor, emperor Menelik took over, who had a hard time incorporating the relationship between the Afar and Tigrayan. This was partly due to his expansion into peripherals and fighting European colonialism simultaneously. At his death, Lij Iyyasu, who was to replace him, became controversial, and Lij Iyasu escaped to Afar, as did Ras Kassa, as he was denied his position as king.

Nevertheless, later on, handed over to the Ethiopian authority of Haile Sellassie. Emperor Haile Sellasie, through the provincial ruler of Tigray, introduced reform in the country's administration, handing over parts of northern Afar under the Tigray regional rule. The local administration of Tigray was led by the heir of Yohannes IV of Enderta. Hence, first, let us see the relations between the Afar and the Tigrayan under the rule of the emperor.

#### **3.1 Relations Under Emperor Yohannes IV**

The Afar relation with Tigrayan should be seen first at inter-provincial levels but later on, became an intra-provincial relationship which included the Northern Afar included into Tigrayan provincial administration of Ethiopia. Ras Kassa (later Emperor of Ethiopia) was accepted as a refugee, where he stayed in Abala town and was provided with food and security. He was even allowed to have his church where he stayed and was provided with information about the development of his province through Daagu (means news in the Afar language) and to have contact with the British forces stationed at the Red Sea. As the British expedition approached Tigray province, he joined them to fight against Emperor Tedros of Ethiopia.

After the defeat of Emperor Tedros's force on the battlefield of Makdala, Kassa remained an influential uncontested leader in the country and became the Emperor of Ethiopia. His central vision was driven by unity under his Christianity rule, which put him at loggerhead with Muslims around Ethiopia and beyond. Against this background, he had to start the war with the immediate neighbors, which targeted the Afar and the Northern Wello people. He did this with Abala town and surroundings, where he was accepted as a guest of honor earlier. The emperor carried out repeated attacks against Northern Afar. The war was said to have been led by Yohannes IV personally on the battlefield. Several battles took place between the Afar and the forces of the emperor until he was killed in the battle of Matemma by the Sudanese Mahdist.

### **3.2 Relations Under Emperor Menelik**

After the death of Emperor Yohannes IV, Emperor Menelik took over power in the country. The emperor had two ambitions: one was to consolidate its power base within the country and, at the same time, influence the peripheries as much as possible. The obstacle to this progress appeared to be the expansion of colonial powers in the Horn of Africa, which partitioned the people in the region. Gradually, these people were subject to colonial rule and became states with defined boundaries. The Afar were divided into Italy and France colonies, whereas many remained inside Ethiopia. However, Northern Afar became part of the Tigray and Eritrean administration's sphere of influence. Both Tigrayan and the Afar were threatened by colonial pressure during the following period.

### **3.3 Relation During the Aborted Rule of Li Iyasu**

The formal relationship with Tigrayan was not more than informal. The legitimacy of Lij Iyyas was not approved by the Shewan aristocracy and churchmen of Ethiopia, and he was disassociated from his position in the hierarchy of the royalty. The Tigrayan was interested in the salt resource of Asale. He ran away to Afar and lived in Awsa, then gradually allowed to migrate to the northern Afar where he negotiated through the Tigrean Royalty rulers with the Emperor Haile Sellase and was handed over to the authorities in Addis Ababa but put in prison where he gradually died. His cause of death and fate circumstances are not yet clear up to this day.

### **3.4 Relations Under Emperor Haile Selassie**

Haile Selassie throned in Addis Ababa, and he was busy with challenging regional powers, internally caught by the Italian Fascist invasion, which forced him into exile to Europe. On his return after the Second World War, Haile Selassie introduced a new form of administration, which reformed the Northern Afar into the province of Tigray. The power was held by local Tigrayan royalist leaders like Menguesha Suyum, who identified himself with the region's history, and Emperor Haile Selassie until the middle of the 1970s ruled Tigray.

Under the Provincial Administration of Tigray, the Tigre regional or local government collected taxes (imposed on Salt Caravans from As-Ale). It became a means to exert direct influence over the Northern Afars bordering Tigray. Meanwhile, the Tigrayan warlords sanctioned by the Tigrayan leaders subdued the people up to the 1974 revolution. This meant that the Afar were pressurized to administration mismanagement and became subject to political and economic exploitation for the decades following.

Meanwhile, in Tigre province, the Afars were divided into four sub-regions, the inderta, Kilde Awlalo, Agame, Raya, and Azabo, sub-provinces which made life become harder for the people. In order to implement its subjugation to the Afar of Abala, the Tigrayan authorities posted armed militia to evict the local people out of their land. They confiscated their land to be used for the Tigrayan royal family. Due to this illegal action, conflict with local authorities has continued since the 1960s. To this end, the provincial government of Tigray took over the land around Abala through a guarding force and maintained the land ownership in this area. Besides, the provincial administration of Tigray backed relations with other Tigrayans to fight the Afars in the south. The

most apparent backup of the leaders in Mekale has been given to that of Wajirat (a Tigrayan group) in the southern Tigray, which always yearned to occupy part of the Afar in the south of the region through invasion. The headquarters of the invading army was at Makoni in southern Tigray. There are vivid stories about their invasion. Their famous warlord Burkahaabule was killed by Afar in Baadu (an Afar area situated in the Middle of Awash Valley), which ended the war. The Agame sub-province was not that much involved in the invasion of Afar but politically worked closely with the provincial government of Tigray.



## **IV. Relations Under the Leftist Governments**

Relations under the leftist governments varied according to which one was holding power. In the first instance, a military government was based ideologically on promoting a socialist state. The government that followed the collapse of the military government was made up of rebel groups led by the woyane domination. Initially, the woyane advocated the Albanian type of socialist theory but managed to balance their view according to the political environment as it came to power. My idea is not very much concerned with whether their ideological framework is up to socialism or not; rather see how the relationship between the Afar and Tigrayans operated during this time.

### **4.1 Relations during the Military Regime**

The Afar relations with Tigray were very much affected by the critical situation of the Tigrayan rebel group of the woyane. This time the Afar area of the north was under a strict security problem zone. Relations during the TPLF Armed Struggle. Soon after the military took over the governance in Addis Ababa declared it committed to a socialist ideology, the situation in the country became tense. The Afar and the Tigrayan took arms to oppose the military government. The Afar, in general, were very much uneasy about such government commitment. The Afar relation with Tigrayan province under the military of Ethiopia was very much subject to domestic conflict.

The provincial administration was very much involved in rebel issues rather than army or development matters in the area. Against this background, the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) was formed in the middle of the 1970s. At the same time, the Tigrayan came to Revolt, led by Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF, also known as Woyane). The other group became known as the Ugugmo and followed later on. The penetration of TPLF into Afar was made with good intentions. Initially, the TPLF came into the Northern Afar region searching for a hideout from the Ethiopian army. Gradually, the rebel group arrived at the Tigrayan border of the Afar villages of Kadda Hara, Laadumin (situated northwest of Farasdagge), and was captured by the TPLF to control the Afar area, which was then part of Tigray province in an earlier administration.

In its major push, the TPLF first entered the area through Konnaba, Awu, and Aala (Barahle) and continued towards Eritrea in 1978, where fighting broke out. In addition to that, the formation of the Afar Ugugumo (rebellion) came into being on September 13, 1979. Several factors contributed to the birth of Ugugumo in the Northern Afar region. Among others, the Afar conflict with TPLF contributed to the emergency and growth of the Ugugumo front in the region. Finally, the Woyane adopted Erebti as its stronghold and stationed a mobile group to monitor the area from that time on. The growing Afar force in the region and Ugugumo became a strong force and controlled all trade routes between the north and the south and harassed government activities in the Afar region.

Behind the scenes, there was a deeply rooted desire for resource ambition, which was later covered under the slogan coined "Greater Tigray." Initially, this idea of greatness was coined by Italian colonialists in Eritrea, which intended to expand its colonial sphere of influence beyond Eritrea into Ethiopia through ethnicity. The territorial claim's ambition was passed to the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Those who do not know the area are very much confused about

the region belonging to Tigray in the past, but the issue was made during the administration reform but not before.

The growing intensity of the Afar rebellion against the Tigrayans forced the TPLF to create a new Afar; a group called the Tigray Afar Democratic Union (TADU). The TPLF gradually managed to create a small group of Afars, who had been with the front throughout its initial struggle years and organized them under the TPLF leadership. The woyane was Shaping an Afar surrogate Group. According to local tradition, the union was made up of those recruits of the TPLF who were commonly known as commandos. They struggled against the atrocities committed by the Derg (The Military Junta) at Erebti River, at a place called Lakora, Yallo, Abala, and Magale between 1980 and 1981. In March 1988, the Tigray Afar Democratic Union was officially established at Lakora at Erebti in the Afar region.

As the TADU officially became a separate entity, it became a controversial one because they did not want the division of the Afar into two and opposed it for good. Thus, TPLF gradually dropped the "T" out of the name. The Afar fighting force continued the struggle inside but was named ADU. TPLF-administered areas inside the Afar region was handed over to the union. In contrast, the TPLF still held the military camps until the front took over power in Addis Ababa.

#### **4.2 Relations Under the Federal Government**

Relations during this period were determined first by the Woyane rule, i.e., its political and socio-economic superiority over the Afar was simultaneously consolidated. After the new government was formed, doubtful criteria were used to choose parliament members and government positions. There were not many disputes about the changes, and the need for peace and stability was overwhelming. The people were exhausted by the war. Falling to the woyane by the people's uprising, they resorted to confrontation with the central government through military aggression, starting from the Afar region.

#### **4.3 Relations Under the Woyane Government**

As woyane took over power in Addis Ababa, the relationship between the Afar and the woyane shifted in favor of the latter.

***The charter conference:*** During this time, all rebel groups in Ethiopia, which were fighting against the military government of Ethiopia, participated in the forum. This conference began peacefully after 17 years of civil wars in the country. The only Afar rebel group present at the conference was the ALF, but the Ugugumo did not attend. Among the crucial points raised were the independence of Eritrea and the right to self-rule of every national group. At least, it was possible to pass over the obstacle and come to a transitional government to be formed to present a national constitution to rule the country in the future after three years. As a regional government was formed, the question was how to go about the new regional administration's politics, economics, and social development. Throughout the past few decades, the Afar were divided into several sub-provinces and districts of Eastern Ethiopia, where they remained as insignificant minorities in each unit of the administration. Although pieces of the Afar area were retained in neighboring Tigray, the Afar in Ethiopia were shaped into five sub-regions and districts through

arbitrary and, considering the previous administration settings, now had to form its regional administration. Thus, it was considered a significant step towards progress and unity.

During this transitional period, the woyane government pressurized representatives of the Afar government to follow all agendas set by its political objectives. They took over the State Farms of the Awash Valley and collected and transported its equipment to Tigray without any reference. They also warned the ALF to lay down their arms in September 1991, which was rejected by the people, causing an armed confrontation between the two groups. The Afar argued that the woyane itself was a rebel group and did not have the legitimacy to disarm the ALF. The conflict initially started at Datbahari, south of Dubtie town, spread around Lower Awash Valley and into the Middle Awash Valley, causing immense damage to people and livestock. On the political side, the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) won the first election in the Afar Region without any doubt. Luckily, it molded the Afar regional administration out of scattered administration of the past, including the districts' formation. This was unexpected for the Tigrayan dominated government of Ethiopia. Therefore, it caused the administration's systematic budgetary restrictions.

In the second step, the woyane changed its tactics to challenge the ALF government through election fraud, bringing its ally Qade (a woyane Afar support group) to power. In addition to that, the woyane had its proxy government, which implemented their desires and wishes on the ground. Since this government was so weak that it could not implement the desired decisions properly because of the Afar opposition, it decided to lull other Afar opposition elements as partners as a fake alliance through division and rule on the ground. The ALF was internally forced to be divided among its leaders. Other opposition parties were divided separately. Only a fraction of each party was taken to training and ultimately joined the pro-Tigray group and finally created what became known as Afar People's Democratic Party (APDP), which continued to rule the region. Since this time, the woyane monopolized the political power of Ethiopia in general and that of Afar in particular. Meanwhile, the woyane seemed to have secured its political power in the country and formally dropped its formal claims to "greater Tigray" which may have overwhelmed the grate of Ethiopia than provincial interests.

***In the development context:*** As shown practically speaking, the woyane gave its past desire of developing Tigray and at the same time separating it from Ethiopia by all means as they happened to seize power in Addis Ababa. As the Afar region had practically everything needed in the region, it took over the construction effort to carry out the planned projects in the region. Road, infrastructure in health, education, and housing facilities accommodated the regional administration; their constructors took over to carry out urbanization in the region. The most interesting in this context was regional cooperation with Tigray, and the Amhara regions were the best cooperative efforts to reach inaccessible areas for development. Thanks to this cooperation, the western Afar peripheries were opened for development. This was one of the most significant projects where the Afar region was booming.

The project agreement was against the Afar region's inability to implement any development projects in this Afar peripheral area. There was nothing that had been done under the previous rule of Ethiopia. There was a contract that could do any project construction there by then. This could be done through the cooperation of the neighboring Tigray and Amhara regions. Therefore, the budget for all these projects was transferred to these neighboring regions to implement as if it were

part of their development projects. The development areas were divided, Zone 1 of the Afar to Tigray region, whereas zones 4 and 5 were given to the Amhara region. However, those agreed upon were done according to the rule and processes of the project implementations with time. Whereas those who agreed with that of the Tigrean were given a charge of one person in an office and had hardly any time to implement the projects within the framework of procedures of the project, which was considered a double burden to a single individual and budget, but nobody dared to question about its speed or deficiencies at all. However, the project was late out of construction procedures. Despite all the difficulties and shortcomings, the cooperation of the Afar zones have been remarkably still for regional development in any essential development endeavor in the area. I believe this could be a lesson for inter-regional cooperation in the future.

As things went on, the Afar regional government and the woyane monopolized everything to suffocation in the country in general and that of the Afar in particular, which led to public outrage and removed the superiority of the woyane government in the country. However, it should be noted that all projects constructed under the neighboring Amhara and Tigrayan were destroyed by the Woyane invasion recently.

The Start of the Conflict. During the shift of power from Tigrayan, a popular uprising came about in 2018. Gradually, the TPLF reorganized itself and openly declared a war of aggression on the central federal government of Ethiopia. Besides, the war of aggression started against the Afar in zone 4, only to block the main access road to central Ethiopia. That triggered the main confrontation between the Ethiopian government and the Afar region that continued into the Northern Afar.

## V. Relations Under the Reform Government

Concerning Tigray, after withdrawal to Mekele, nothing remarkable happened immediately since the woyane was preparing to take over the power again as they did in 1991. Under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister, the Afar was expected to be more relaxed out of suppression. TPLF trained, recruited, organized armies, and so on. Soon after, it declared its position by organizing its own election without recognizing the central government. They refused the effort to come to reconciliation and ultimately massacred the north defense force, who had been stationed there for years, and refused to remobilize the army to central Ethiopia. The central government could defend its territorial integrity as an alternative attempt to failure. Thus, the war started due to the aggression started by the Tigrayan by the massacre on the part of the national army in Maytabri, who defended the country since the war with Eritrean in 2018.

### 5.1 The First Confrontation

The Afar were reserved for the Tigrayan position until it invaded the region. This had never happened during the late 28 years. When the invasion started in zone four of the Afar region, people were surprised. The Tigrayan invasion was known in the past during Emperor Yohannes IV and remained an unforgettable historical incident of the time. Like the other areas of Ethiopia, the Tigrayan indeed destroyed, raped women, and almost destroyed the whole district aligned with the neighboring Tigray region.

*The First Aggression* is in the Afar Sub-region. The first invasion started in the Afar region in zone four from Yallo, Kaluwan, Awra, and Uwwa Districts. As the Tigrayan arrived at the border of the Afar, they were asked about their mission to enter the Afar region. The Afar were told their mission was to break the highway at millie and that they had nothing to do with the Afar. The Afar responded that it was unacceptable to the Afar region to disturb the security. Despite the Afar not accepting it, the invasion would happen by force with a huge army, and the confrontation was on the spot. As Tigrayan had massive armies to break through, the Afar were unprepared but felt strongly about their Tigrayan invasions and raids. As a result of the attack, the destruction was unbelievable beyond any estimates of humans, livestock, and material.

*The Second Aggression:* The second invasion targeted Chiffra and Garsa Gita to cross the Millie junction. The invader army captured the town and destroyed the infrastructure, schools, health centers, mosques, and residents. Capturing all four districts of zone four gave them the energy to go ahead and lulled more armies to fight through. Meanwhile, the head of the invaders said in his press statement how the Afar dared to reject the invading Tigrayan to enter their region, which was mocked and indicated the weak Afar could not fight back the strongest Tigrayan forces ever. The statement cleared the doubt about the Tigrayan intention and raised anger among all Afars in each corner of the Afar region even beyond. Such fighting and confrontation consolidated where the woyane loss became beyond estimated to be unimaginable.

The second confrontation continued at Garsa Gita, which was targeted to capture Millie and cost the woyane dearly. The defeat, the massacre, and the destruction of Chiffra were not enough for the woyane. They wanted to capture the Millie junction, where the Afar forces managed to fight both woyane armies from Chifra and Batti and consolidated the fighting. Here, the intention of

invading the army became Afars and the whole Ethiopians. The joint forces of Ethiopians and the Afar region that stood against the invading army realized the impossibility of reaching the Millie juncture to stop all communication to and from Ethiopia. The towns of Chifra and Garsa were destroyed to the ground, and zone five of the Afar was the next target of aggression.

***The Third Aggression:*** The third alternative to the invasion was directed at Hadale Ela in zone five. This front was expected to be supported by invading forces from Shewa Robit and hoped to connect the way to the Issa-Somalis in the East, probably to reach Djibouti or Somaliland, which was expected to cut off the road to Addis Ababa and use up communication with the outside world. This passage was considered to consolidate relations between the woyane and the Issa-Somalis, also expected to channel the way out of Tigrayan leadership and blocked contact with the outside World contacts. Although they pushed into the Hadele Ela, also supported by the Shewa Robit force of the Tigrayans, this time, the Afars and the other Ethiopian coordinated troops were too strong to penetrate the Undafo village and block their move to the highway at last. The defeat of the woyane contributed to its decline in the parallel Amhara Region. The ultimate defeat of the Woyane at the invaded area: In the end, the joint forces of Ethiopia and the Afar were very much consolidated to push back the woyane forces from invading Afar and Amhara to seize the opportunity to capture Addis Ababa - Afar Millie junction. The Tigrayan troops were defeated and followed up to Tigrayan borders, and it was expected that it was no longer a threat to neighboring Amhara and Afar regions.

## **5.2 The Second Confrontation**

The expectation for peace was doomed to failure by the woyane attacking the Afar Region in the North, Abala, Magale, Barahle, and Konoba, and the surroundings again. Soon after the defeat at zone four, one, and five of the Afar and Northern Amhara, woyane worked hard to revive the morale of its defeated forces and attacked with a heavy weapon and artillery the town of Abala and its surroundings from long-distance shootings. The bombing of the area made the civilians evacuate to the East and settle towards Erebe and Hamad Ela towns.

***The Abala front:*** The town is approximately 50 KM from Mekele. It is the closest town to the Tigrean provincial administration and the most affected by Tigrayan relations through time. It was here that Ras Kassa ran away and stayed as a refugee. He abducted the daughter of chief Yakume and gradually established himself as Emperor and fought against this area. Also, the Emperor attacked Afar to forcefully convert them to Christianity under the slogan of a united Christian state. He led the war in the area personally, where his ambush site is remembered to the public until today. The members heir continued to capture the area through different methods and means. As the Tigrayan provincial administration was established, the royal Tigrean family led the province and established its Neftenja (men equipped with Guns) stationed and imposed its economic and political will on the people there.

The worst of it this time was that woyane was linked and organized these mercenaries to fight the Afar throughout time. The people claimed that the occupied areas were declared as belonging to Tigray. As woyane lost their power in the central government, the local Tigrayan also felt they lost power. This group raised the Tigrayan question and sympathy for the woyane, which was unexpected to the local Afar. These Neftenjas had solid ground and wished to control the area by



all means and now felt about time to capture the areas together with invading armies of woyane. The old wounds of the Afar revived, and they felt betrayed, which made the confrontation between the local communities bloody.

***The Barahle Front:*** The war was to continue to Barahle. Barahle was the source of the salt mine of As Ale, where there has been a long communication with Tigrayan through the salt trade. Here, an intensive Camel caravan moves the salt by camel days and night, where the two communities are interdependent. This intensity has been going on throughout the history of memorable times and to these days. The exchange contacts have never been interrupted throughout the civil war, except during the invasion led by Emperor Yohannes IV. The woyane tried to manipulate the area's resources while it held power in the central government but failed.

The recent attack by Woyane came to Afar and the neighboring Tigrayans as a surprise. The two communities had an excellent interaction through all problems between and among themselves. The neighboring Tigrayans were hesitant to involve themselves in the conflict unless forced. As the woyane forces carried out the attack, everybody was to involve themselves. Many forced recruits' hand themselves over to the Afars on the battlefield.

***The Magale front:*** This district has been the most affected because the woyane considered the area to belong to Tigray. To this end, the woyane repeatedly raids the local people. The attack of woyane was not new for the local people; there are cases of the local administration while the woyane was in power in Ethiopia but ignored by the administration. Now that the woyane lost control in the central government and at the battlefield of the Afar in the south, the woyane came up with a new plan to recapture the area by force. The woyane could open war in the area and got a group of Afar-led defectors men like Seyoum Awol, who led the regional government over 25 years in the past and lost power with the loss of control of woyane governmentship in Ethiopia. Seyoum managed to run away to Mekale from where he visited his family in the north. His siding with woyane proved his background that he was always the woyane soldier while he was involved in running the regional government. As he was directly involved, as a man who knew the area and the people, the cost of the war damage was enormous.

***The Konna front:*** This district has been known for its history of hosting the First Hijra of Muslims, but the woyane has always claimed it due to its resource of gold and other minerals findings. The gold potential is very much known among the Afar but not yet exploited on a big scale. This is also the most known to the woyane, which tried to include the area into the Tigray region but failed. It was here that the woyane came first to find a hideout from the military government of Ethiopia. The woyane attacks have been going on, even when it held power in Addis Ababa. This time, the attacks were open and huge in scale and used all means of heavy weapons that should never be used in a domestic conflict. Most evacuated Afar from the attacked districts found their safety in Hamad Ele and Erebti.

***The Erebti front:*** Initially, Erebti was the headquarters of the woyane during their armed operation. It was here that the woyane leaders of Meles Zenawi and others regularly had their seats, where their hiding places were known until they captured power in Addis Ababa. Here, Qaade, a woyane Afar supporter, was operated as an organization and made the district known for its strategic importance. The woyane raids of today do not know the area properly, and the conflict

continues to this day. This invasion and confrontation were the most destructive, both human and material. The invasions were supported by heavy weapons and tanks and even used other dangerous weapons, cluster bombs. Thousands of people were displaced, animals were just massacred, and they ran away from the sounds of the area's bombs and tanks.

***The Denied Refugees of the Conflict:*** Afar had never experienced such massive displacement and refugees since the revolution of Ethiopia around Awsa in 1974. In Awsa, the conflict was driven by a socialist regime that intended to destroy the traditional society in Awsa and beyond. Instead of transforming the community through time, the army regime resorted to radical changes that distorted the community without any replacement instead. The revolution in Ethiopia affected every ethnic group in the country, but some were affected more than others throughout history.

The classical problem with Afar refugees is that they are never declared as refugees publicly but join their clan wherever they happen to be displaced. Due to this, the Afar refugees are not recognized by international organizations or the world. Thus, the communities had to run away from the area to Djibouti and even beyond across the Red Sea. The same happened to the Afars displaced from zone four, one, and five of Afar and those displaced currently from zone two, making refugees' critical and urgent situation in the zone difficult.

***The critical situation of the refugees in the area:*** The refugee encampment is very much diffused. Where the conflict is still going on, the woyane uses still distance firing to areas where people titled resided to cause maximum death and destruction. Therefore, civilians were forced to run away from their traditional settlements to avoid the risk of death, but removing their livestock was the most difficult one. Besides, livestock is very much disturbed by the distance firing, which causes them to run away and disperse in different directions. Therefore, people are removed in every direction so that one cannot identify their places and the number of refugees. Those who survive and find their way to camps are stationed at Erbti, Hamad Ela, Afdera, Guyah, Sardo, and Away to Logia. The refugee situation was massive and needed both resources and management to handle the support of the local government, which was under woyane siege and needed the international community's intensive support.

## VI. Recommendation

To normalize and sustain a good relationship between Tigray and Afar again, certain preconditions must be fulfilled:

- To introduce Ceasefire with an immediate effect and withdrawal of the Tigray invading force from Afar Region back to Tigray.
- To establish a security buffer zone between Tigray and the Afar Regions, to establish a non-military zone between the two regions where no armies presence and operation was allowed,
- To put on trial the federal government who ignored to protect zone two of the Afar from invading forces,
- To put the woyane forces on trial for massacre and displacement of the Afar of zone two,
- To request compensation for all humanitarian and destruction of the Afar invaded areas,
- Define the boundaries between the Afar and the Tigrayan as soon as possible,
- Start negotiation regarding the territories of the Afar that were kept inside Tigray by Woyane during their rule in Ethiopia, and
- To promote a series of conferences and seminars regarding good neighborhood, development, and commercial interaction.

## VII. Concluding remarks

The relationship with the Tigrayan has gone through different periods with changing characteristics. It was based on socio-economic interactions in the remote past, without any political impact. Things changed during the period known as "The Era of the Princes" in Ethiopia. There is no documentation as to how Tigrayan ever dominated the political fate of the Afar before the conflict emerged during the era of princes in Ethiopia. Ras Mikael Sehul initiated the first major known attacks against the Afar to widen its sphere of influence. He was to control Tigray as a whole and needed to impose its power beyond it. Sehul repeatedly invaded western Afar occasionally, but Ras Kassa pushed him aside.

On the eve of Ras Kassa was taking over the power in Tigray, he was countered by Emperor Tedros, who considered controlling Ethiopia as a whole, including Tigray. The challenge made Emperor Tedros strong, fearing his growth; Ras Kassa had to run away to Afar only to return after Tedros was defeated. After the death of Tedros at Makdal in 1887, due to the invasion of the British expeditionary Force, Ras Kassa was to take over the rule of the country as a whole and became the Emperor of Ethiopia. The emperor's policy was to unite the country under Christianity and invade northern Ethiopia before being killed at Matama by the Sudanese Mahdist.

Emperor Menelik turned the power shift to central Ethiopia. Under the Emperor's rule, Menelik took over at the death of Emperor Yohannes IV. The power of Lij Iyasu remained in a bracket under the country's political history. After various political turns in the country, Emperor Haile Selassie came to power. However, he was forced to escape the country as the Italian Fascist invasion came about during the initial period of the Second World War. At the end of the Second World War, his return from exile meant a new perspective in Ethiopia. After the Second World War, to reform the national administration, the northern Afar were placed under the provincial administration of Tigrayan, and the royal leader of Seyoum Mengesha, an heir of Emperor Yohannes IV, had the upper hand. Tigrayan leaders saw that the Northern Afar administered and its resources were controlled and opened up for the provincial administration. Before the provincial administration could control the area, a new socialist government came into being and resulted in the emergency of rebel groups in the province.

Under the socialist regime, the Tigrayan came with a new rebel group called the woyane. During the woyane armed struggle period, the woyane learned the potential of the Afar resources in the north and consolidated its desire to capture all of it together. This wish of Tigray was implemented under the Woyane rule of Ethiopia, which saw to it that the Afar were neutralized from their political, economic, and social empowerment and were suppressed for over 27 years and remained backward with a development perspective. When the Ethiopian people turned up to dismantle the woyane rule through a popular uprising, it withdrew to Tigray, opposing the federal government. Thus, it continued to fight the central government and the neighboring Afar and Amhara regions. This situation made the woyane fight Afar alone and the whole Ethiopian state; this would undoubtedly raise the political conditions to an upper level where more external countries must be involved. Practically more countries are involved in this respect. The cost of the war could be higher not only for Afar but also for Ethiopia as a whole, including the Tigrayans.

Finally, the Tigrayan rules have intended to play down the Afar significance from the past to the present day and operated based on denying their right only to take over the region. It has been more apparent than before that the intention of woyane while pretending to advocate for federalism in Ethiopia, is to destroy neighboring regional states without considering their rights and identities. Ultimately, the Tigrayan confrontation is now driven by their failure in the Afar zone to take revenge against northern Amhara and Afar. The result of such blind and destructive action could unite Afar and the whole of Ethiopia. If the Tigrayan people remain silent about the woyane invading the Afar region, the good relations between the two communities as damage remains for good in the future! Unless the woyane leaders rethink their withdrawal, they may be forced to ultimate destruction forever; finally, peaceful coexistence as neighbors is impossible.

**The End**