

# AFRICUS ERITREA



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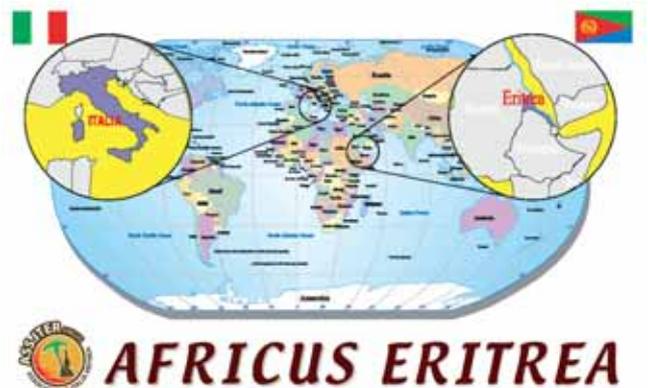
Istituto di Cultura Eritrea



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# EDITORIALE

di Lidia Corbezzolo

Carissimi Amici e carissime Amiche, è iniziata una nuova collaborazione tra Africus Eritrea ed alcuni giornalisti eritrei di Asmara.

La grande novità è che questi articoli saranno in lingua inglese: poiché saremo anche on-line, abbiamo pensato che per gli eritrei che ci seguiranno a livello internazionale sarà più agevole leggerci in inglese. Gli articoli invece che riguarderanno i progetti dell'Associazione o altri argomenti relativi all'Eritrea tra passato e presente saranno in lingua italiana.

Sono orgogliosa dell'entusiasmo e della simpatia con cui i giovani giornalisti eritrei hanno accettato di collaborare con Africus Eritrea.

Io cerco sempre di coinvolgere i giovani sia nei progetti di solidarietà sia nei progetti culturali: il futuro è dei giovani.

Quindi tutti insieme diamo il benvenuto a Daniel Semere, Meron Abraha, Ghebretnsae Damr, Jacob Kahsay, Dejen Kidane, Sirak Kbrom, Samuel Mengsteab.

Di seguito troverete la scheda di Africus Eritrea per essere aggiornati sull'evoluzione che ha avuto la nostra rivista.

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# 5X MILLE

Hai uno strumento unico per promuovere il diritto all'educazione e alla salute per i bambini e i giovani dell'Eritrea destina il 5 x mille dell'IRPEF alla nostra Associazione.

Il 5 x mille non sostituisce l'8 x mille (destinato alle confessioni religiose) e non è un costo aggiuntivo per il contribuente.

È una quota di imposte a cui lo Stato rinuncia per destinarla alle organizzazioni no-profit per sostenere le loro attività.

Trasforma la denuncia dei redditi in una dichiarazione di solidarietà per i bambini e i giovani dell'Eritrea

Ecco come fare: Firma nel riquadro della dichiarazione dedicato alle organizzazioni Non Lucrative, riporta sotto la firma il codice fiscale dell'ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIA ERITREA ONLUS C.F. 96 10 45 30 587

Foto: David Bellone - Riprodotto da www.assitercomitalia.org

Nel 2002 il primo notiziario dell'Associazione con una veste grafica tipografica si chiamava ASS.I.R.ET Notizie (Associazione Residenti e Rimpatriati dall'Eritrea ed Etiopia).

Nasceva con l'intento di dare un contenuto più ampio al notiziario: non solo ricordi asmarini ma anche poesia, attualità, opinioni, pagine di storia, progetti di cooperazione allo sviluppo, progetti culturali.

Nel settembre 2003 due grandi cambiamenti l'Associazione assume il nome di ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIA ERITREA Onlus esprimendo la volontà di dedicarsi esclusivamente all'Eritrea, l'acronimo ITER sintetizza il cammino che l'Associazione percorre: ★ il cammino per la vita per le popolazioni dell'Eritrea, ★ anche il notiziario cambia il nome in AFRICUS che significa AFRICANO ma anche VENTO DEL SUD, il titolo è un omaggio alla terra d'Africa.

Nel 2010 il notiziario cambia il nome in AFRICUS ERITREA e segna una stretta collaborazione con l'Ambasciata dello Stato di Eritrea, l'Istituto di Cultura Eritrea, il sito eritrea eritrea.com, l'Associazione giovani eritrei YPFDJ.

Dal 2012 anche alcuni giornalisti eritrei di Asmara collaborano con Africus Eritrea: Daniel Semere, Meron Abraha, Sirak Kbrom, Dejen Kidane, Ghebretinsae Damir. Samuel Mengsteab, Jakob Kahsai.

Africus Eritrea conterrà articoli in italiano ed in inglese e sarà pubblicato on-line, saranno stampate solo le copie per gli aderenti alla Associazione.

# ASMARA, ERITREA, MARZO-APRILE 2012

*di Michelangelo Ciminale*

**L**uisa Marigliano Ramaglia, maestra dell'asilo L'Arcobalena di Roma, e un suo ex-alunno oggi antropologo, Michelangelo Ciminale, soggiornano ad Asmara con l'intento di collaborare al progetto "Il Denden cresce". Assistiti in questo dal presidente della Assiter ONLUS Lidia Corbezzolo, trascorrono quindi tre intense settimane in compagnia dei bambini e delle maestre dell'asilo Denden.

È un periodo in cui un'atmosfera di gran fermento pervade l'intero asilo: sono in corso i lavori per la costruzione di alcuni gazebo nel giardino, si piantano alcuni alberelli, vengono delimitati gli spazi del futuro orto e di un'aiuola di fiori che prenderà la forma dell'Eritrea.

Anche i bambini - o meglio, alcuni di essi - sono direttamente coinvolti in una recita, curata anche

da Luisa e Michelangelo. E una piccola delegazione della scuola partecipa ad una gara di ballo tra asili: una competizione con tutti i crismi, dove il Denden riesce ad ottenere degli ottimi risultati con entrambe le danze proposte, minuziosamente preparate dalle maestre.

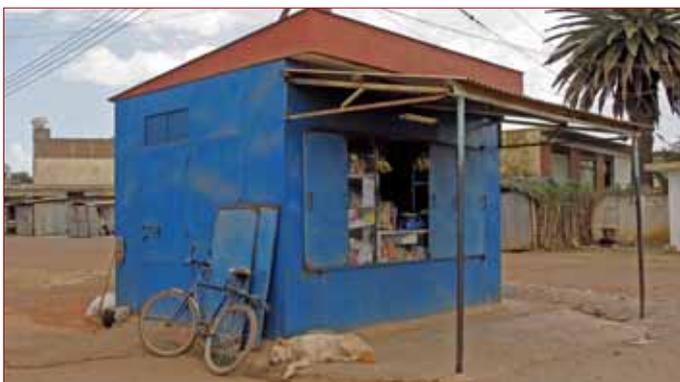
Con le sei maestre del Denden Luisa e Michelangelo intrecciano un legame profondo, per quanto le difficoltà linguistiche lo consentano. In effetti una sola di queste, Alganesh, parla italiano in maniera scorrevole, e assume quindi il ruolo di interprete e ponte tra le proprie colleghe e gli intrusi italiani.

Dal momento che gli aspetti di quest'esperienza sono molteplici e diversi fra loro, i temi verranno sviluppati (tramite il medium fotografico, di cui si è occupato Michelangelo) in sette differenti "capitoli" che riguarderanno:

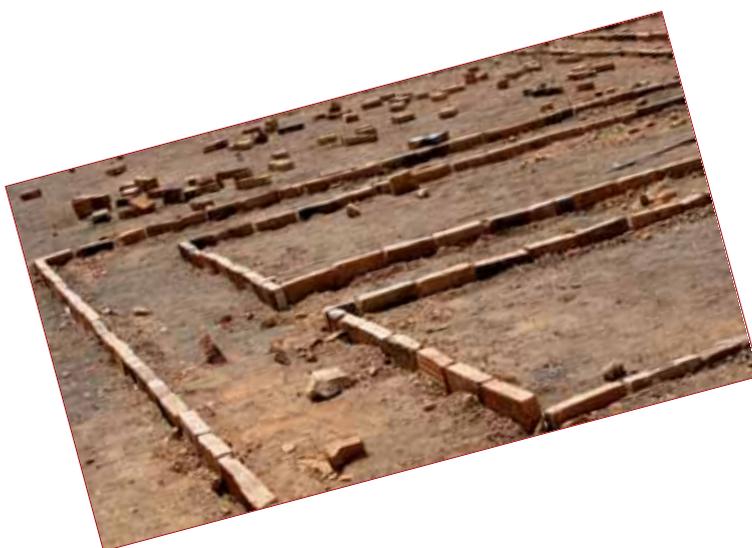
## • La vita di Asmara



- L'asilo Denden e la zona circostante



- La costruzione dei gazebo, la delimitazione dell'orto e le attività di giardinaggio



- La giornata dei bambini in classe e in giardino



- La gara di danza



• **Le maestre e i bambini che hanno parlato della loro esperienza nell'asilo**



Abbiamo scelto di incontrarci con quattro bambini e una bambina, una maestra-Alganesh. I bambini ci hanno raccontato la loro storia e ci hanno parlato della vecchia e della nuova scuola.

**Vi presentiamo i bambini**

**RAI TEKIE:** ha appena compiuto cinque anni e frequenta il Denden da due anni- un anno nel container e un anno nella scuola in muratura. Abita non lontano dal campo (la scuola si trova al suo interno) così viene a scuola e ritorna a casa, da solo. È figlio unico, la sua mamma lavora, il suo papà no.

**ESROM MAHARI:** ha sei anni e ha un fratellino più piccolo. I suoi genitori lavorano entrambi. Abita un po' lontano e viene a scuola e ritorna a casa con un gruppo di bambini del Denden; una mamma o un papà a turno si fanno carico di accompagnarli. Impiegano circa 40 minuti.

**SBHAT TEKLU:** ha cinque anni e abita a Zezerat, una zona divisa dal campo Denden da una fila di rottami (mezzi di trasporto, residua-ti bellici...) lunga più di 10 metri. Viene a scuola e torna a casa col fratello più grande impiegando circa mezz'ora. La sua mamma lavora come cuoca, il papà è andato via.

**SOLIANA HABTEAB:** Vive nel campo e raggiunge la scuola da sola in circa 10 minuti. Ha un

fratello più piccolo di nome Thomas. La mamma lavora in un collegio e il papà fa il soldato.

**YOSAN WELDEGEBRIEL:** ha cinque anni e vive nel campo Denden. Ha 4 fratelli più piccoli. Abita nel campo e viene a scuola da solo. Il papà lavora.

**Assemblea dei bambini**

**RAI:** Quando eravamo nei container non era bello. Non c'era spazio per giocare e eravamo pochi bambini (25/30). Adesso siamo 60 bambini e possiamo giocare tutti. Quando eravamo nel container e scrivevamo, potevamo stare seduti solo 5-6 bambini, adesso possono stare seduti 35 bambini tutti insieme.

**SBHAT:** Ora abbiamo matite, pennarelli, la carta e anche la carta colorata. Adesso è più bello scrivere e colorare.

**ESROM:** Ci sono i giochi di fuori che sono belli, c'è anche la palla e il canestro per il basket.

**YOSAN:** Quando c'erano i container i giochi di fuori erano rotti e non erano colorati.

**ESROM:** Era stretto e non c'erano le finestre, c'era tanto caldo. La lamiera di sopra (il tetto) era aperta e quando pioveva entrava l'acqua e bagnava tutto. La pioggia faceva tanto rumore che faceva paura.

**SBHAT:** Anche le divise non erano così e tanti bambini non ce l'avevano proprio.

**RAI:** Poi sono venuti i dottori e abbiamo fatto

le visite agli occhi, alle orecchie, al cuore e alle ossa.

**YOSAN:** Hanno costruito la scuola, ma prima si veniva poco poco, solo la mattina. Ora stiamo tanto tempo.

**SOLIANA:** Nel container non si lavavano le manine e anche i gabinetti non erano puliti e non erano belli.

**RAI:** Quando sono venuti i dottori abbiamo preso le mutandine, i calzini e le scarpe. Abbiamo mangiato la pizza, i biscotti e i pop-corn.

**YOSAN:** Alla scuola nuova abbiamo detto la poesia "Addio container"

**SBHAT:** Nel container non c'erano le mattonelle e venivano i topi. Mangiavano il legno e poi uscivano e noi avevamo paura.

**SOLIANA:** Nell'ufficio delle maestre ci sono belle sedie e noi abbiamo le sedioline, i tavoli e i

grembiuli. Ci sono le docce e pure il gabinetto.  
**ESROM:** Abbiamo i quaderni. Adesso c'è lo spazio e possiamo prendere i quaderni da soli perché c'è lo spazio.

**Abbiamo chiesto ai bambini cosa vogliono fare da grandi**

*Ecco le risposte*

**RAI:** il meccanico.

**ESROM:** Il dottore che quando uno si ammala lo posso guarire.

**SBHAT:** il poliziotto per dire ai ladri e a quelli che ammazzano che non lo devono fare.

**SOLIANA:** Il dottore a quelli che si ammalano e aiutare le persone che non stanno bene.

**YOSAN:** Autista dell'aereo perché voglio andare e vedere le altre città.

- Le attività ricreative avviate anche grazie al contributo del gemellaggio con l'asilo L'Arcobalena



Michelangelo Ciminale, antropologo collaboratore dell'Associazione Italia Eritrea onlus da marzo 2012

# OPERATION FENKIL: AT THE FOREFRONT OF ERITREA'S VICTORY AS IN THE PAST

by *Daniel Semere*



Massawa has always been an important place in Eritrea. Its strategic importance in terms of location, economy, politics and culture has made it a target for many colonial powers. It has been colonized

by Portugal, Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and Italian. It became the capital of Eritrea until this was moved to Asmara in 1897. Massawa was captured by the Ottoman Empire in 1557; during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was ruled by Egypt with ottoman consent. Following the defeat of Egypt at the battle of Gura'e, it came under the control of Italy in 1885.



All along this time Massawa has served as a hub for the socio-economic and political life of colonial Eritrea. Perhaps that is the reason why a fierce battle was fought between the Eritrean

liberation forces and the last colonial power in Eritrea, Ethiopia.

In February 1990 the port city of Massawa was

liberated by the famous operation of Fenkil. A sudden and swift attack changed forever the future map of the liberation struggle. At the heart of this operation, February 8, 1990 was a historic day. At that day the liberation army started its victorious journey from She'eb in two wings. In the first wing, the Eritrean fighters ambushed the enemy camps around Gahtelay; and the second force marched to the mountains of Shekor through Mai Atal to Dogoli and Gurgusum. Just within a day the Eritrea liberation army destroyed enemy camp in those areas. In the following days, the second wing went on to the main road of Asmara-Gahtelay. The first half of this force went to the eastern side of Gahtelay and Dgedegeta as result of which the liberation army liberated all the areas of Demas, htumlo and Edaga demolishing a number of enemy military camps. This ultimately led to the liberation of Massawa and its environ on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1990.

The liberation of Massawa by Eritrea liberation army was a major victory heralding the full liberation of the country. Everyone knew that independence was inevitable. The desperation of the enemy was reflected upon mad bombardment of the city and its people with napalm and cluster bombs. However unlike the first liberation of Massawa in 1977 this liberation was to last till full independence.

Today, after all those years of hardship the city enthusiastically celebrates its anniversaries of freedom. Celebration continues a full one week with colorful events. Thousand of pilgrims from all over the nation and even abroad, flow to Massawa to celebrate the event. Usually the city is well prepared for the arrival of guests and streets and different buildings are embellished with the national flag and light works. The majestic sear illuminates the mood of the city through its reflection of the lights.

More than 20 years of independence,

Massawa now exhibits the developmental endeavor of the nation adding to the festive mood of the city. There are some tangible developmental endeavors. In order to renovate and transform the city there has been some projects that have been going on since independence. One of the relatively biggest projects in the city has been the construction of the new international airport. This projects that has used up 48 million Nakfa will be playing a crucial role once the free trade zone starts in full swing in the future. The other major developmental activity has been the extension and renovation of the port area. This project required around 190 million Nakfa for its completion in the first and second phases. According to the plan the rehabilitation and extension of the port area includes the construction of large jetties, concrete pavements for erecting three new cranes, and layering railway tracks and installing electric lines and poles. As one of the major Warsay Yekaalo development campaign also, in Massawa there have been a number of housing project along with extension of the road in segalet ketan and segalet dahlakn are but few examples of the post independence reconstruction of the country.

These are but few examples of how the city is rehabilitated to become a modern port and at the center of the country's economy. The Fenkil celebration therefore is a moment of reminiscence for two major events; how the liberation of the city demanded a hefty price and how Massawa is becoming the symbol of our development campaign.

Operation Fenkil is a victory with few matches in the world. The operation was a significant historic juncture that opened the gate towards total independence terminating the reign of colonialism. Now all these years later after the miraculous victory, the city continues to develop revealing that the port

city symbolizes not only military victory but also development miracles registered by the country.

The Eritrean people had been able to secure their rights to self-governance on their own terms not because they had waited for charity

and sympathies from others, but they had confidently struggled depending on their own capacity first and foremost. The Fenkil operation is then a living reminder that if we hold on to our principles in our present or future endeavors the long-term vision of the country will ultimately be realized.



Daniel Semere, is a researcher at Research and Documentation Center, he is also a columnist in Eritrean profile.

# ... OF ERITREAN GREATEST VIRTUES

by *Meron Abraha*



A land of undiscovered treasures, Eritrea has been endowed with a stock of diverse tourism resources. These yet unexplored natural, historical, cultural and archaeological wonders pose great

potentials for the country's future in tourism, making it an ideal and fascinating tourist destination.

From the sweltering heat of the Danakil Depression to the cool mountains of the highlands, Eritrea has been deemed as the land of startling contrasts and one of the four great civilizations of early history.

Its nine ethnic groups united as one people offer visitors a hospitality that has to be experienced to be believed and the chance to discover a new dimension in exciting cultural experiences, a glimpse of a different Africa.

One thing that stands out as a distinct Eritrean feature, and one that has earned its people



great praise and admiration from visitors, is hospitality.

Giacomo Lombardi is an Italian tourist who came to Eritrea for a 10-day visit and ended up falling in love with the people and culture of the country.

When I met him, he had just returned from a three-day excursion to the Dahlak Islands and was completely mesmerized by the experience.

“While on the Dissie Island, I ventured into the inhabited part and was really surprised to find the dwellers all eager to welcome me into their homes,” Giacomo said and went on saying that he lived a first-hand experience of what he had heard about Eritrean hospitality before. Seeing is believing indeed!

## The Drum of Harmony

Eritreans have long been associated with the great notion of hospitality. When it comes to welcoming guests no other peoples can do it best other than Eritreans. And that radiates pride for us.

Music (traditional) always makes part of the hospitable welcome that each ethnic group accords its guests at any given time. And a common instrument that features in all the groups is the drum.

Whether hung on the shoulders or beaten by hands or sticks on the ground, its beat always emits a distinct message for every occasion — be it for welcoming guests, launching campaigns or other activities...



During welcoming ceremonies, men sway with their swords while women ululate and dance off their feet to the beats of the drum. As a guest you find relief and contentment with the warm reception being accorded to you and in no time you are busy exchanging greetings with your fellow country folks.

“Welcome!” “Thank you!” “How are you?”

As the drums keep beating the pleasantries follow, enabling you to realize that in spite of our diversity, our unity always prevails. The Eritrean culture!

### **Generosity**

Anywhere in this country, a stranger can knock at a house and his hosts won't hesitate to prepare him a meal worthy for a king. That's the

spirit of Eritreans towards welcoming guest to their homes.

Sharing your blessings is and has always been a national value well instilled in the minds of our people. They let you in their homes and offer you all they have, on top of their brotherly love and affection.

Being on a trip you resist the temptation of staying for a longer time and just linger for a while, fascinated by their hospitality. And then you proceed on your way only to find warmer receptions.

Even in the vicinities of the hottest place on Earth, where the village of Sireru, the most elevated place in the region, is situated, warm hospitality is guaranteed. The residents are very humble and hospitable and they welcome their guests with traditional music and dancing.

Even if they don't share the same language as their guests, the language of love and respect brings them even closer.

As if you haven't heartily appreciated the affectionate welcome at Sireru, that of Fodie, still a village in the same region, totally puts you at a loss of words for their humbleness.

There and then, you forget your differences and realize your likeness. And deep down inside you feel it: that can only be preserved by staying united at all times.

### **Beauty Never Lasts...**

Beauty has its own time and place. The attire you liked, the tattoos you noticed or the appearance you admired... all have their own way of impressing you.

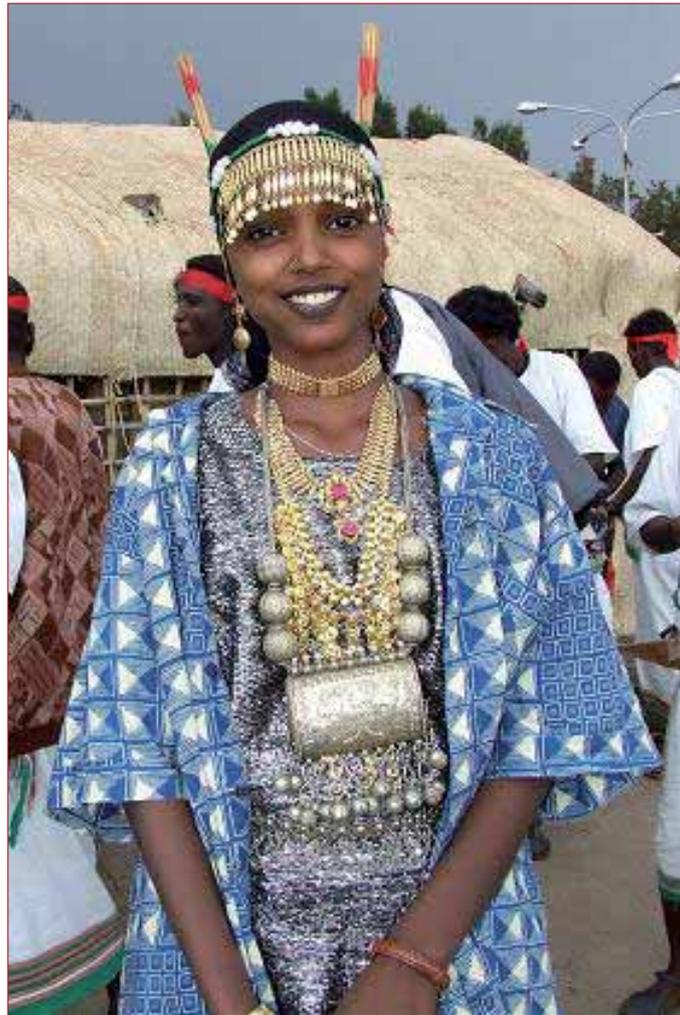
From the smiling Afar woman to the beaming

Hidareb gentleman, the internal and external beauty enables you to take pleasure in it. You realize that you want to remain there forever and be in awe of the beauties that seem to have eluded you all this time. One thing is true: your eyes have already had their feasts.

And before you have stopped admiring all the

attractiveness around you, you are reminded that you have to depart, yet to find more beauties to marvel at.

You would like to stay on for a little longer but it's just as they say: good things never last long enough...



Meron Abraha, is journalist and web chief editor for Shaebia.org.

# OLD, CLASSIC AND BACK

by Jacob Kabsay

**G**iovanni Agnelli founded Fiat (*Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino*), an automobile manufacturing factory, in 1899. It was the same year that Eritrea officially became an Italian colony and asphalt roads quickly made an appearance in most parts of the country. Not long after that, Fiat cars began rolling through Asmara and other towns.



Elders claim that the Fiat *Zero*, a model that was built in Italy in 1912, was in Asmara almost soon after production. The Zero was soon followed by the Fiat 509 around 1925 – it was a tiny car, which could barely squeeze in two well-built men. The Fiat 500, which was also called the *Topolino* arrived in the mid 1930s.



However, the most famous of them all was the *Balila* or the Fiat 508. The car was tiny and looked like a mouse. *Balila* was also more popular with the Italians in the late 1930s when Mussolini's fascist laws had imposed a strict colour bar on Eritreans. Thus, the people coined a song seemingly intended for the car but aimed at expressing their resentment for the laws of segregation. A few lines from the song in Tigrinya are below:

*Balila ye Balila,  
Asmera do Atiki  
Aegarki Yisebera*

*Balila Oh Balila,  
Have you arrived in Asmara,  
May your legs be broken!*

However, the Fiat was not always a symbol of Italian oppression as far as Eritreans were concerned. In time, Eritreans were allowed to own and drive cars by themselves and that is when the following song was sang:

*Tezaweri Balila Tezaweriye  
Shewa'te Hirkam Koynu Mezaweriye*

This song is attributed by some to the singer Beyene Fre while some say it was the late Vittorio Bossi's song. It roughly translates as:

*Ride on the Balila, Ride  
It only costs seven hirkams (quarters) to  
ride...*

So, the song went on and with this there was a shift in the Eritrean hostility towards cars while at the same time there was an increased ownership of cars by Eritreans. Asmara's streets were soon replete with the Fiat 1100 or

the *Musone* –big nose – which has served as the blue taxi for decades until the early 1990s.



At the same time, the Fiat 600, one of the most popular cars in the Eritrean automobile history, made its mark. Amazingly, the Fiat 600 – *Seicento* – is still in use, especially preferred by driving instructors.

The Italians were allied with the Germans in the Second World War and as such, there was no Fiat monopoly in Eritrea. On the contrary, the Volkswagen Beetle vied for the local market with the VW Type 1 dominating from the late 1930s up until the 1950s and beyond. The Volkswagen was very popular because of its efficiency, greater room and its wonderful air-cooled engine.

The VW Beetle has by far won the popularity contest among the classic cars in Asmara.

First, it is widely in use today and has weathered the sands of time in rather good shape.

Second, its unique design – and some even say sexy allure – has driven many youthful owners to renovate and overhaul the Beetle in what may be the Eritrean version of the popular American TV show *Pimp my Ride* minus the cameras.



These days, there are many VW Beetles and younger and bigger models such as the VW 1100, 1200, 1300 being given more garage-time than they ever had since they rolled off their factories decades ago.

Although the Volkswagen originally came in a mild green or white color, it is now being painted pink, yellow and even bold red. The contemporary tastes and demands may seem eccentric but at the same time, they have rejuvenated the VWs and added color to the streets of Asmara.

Nonetheless, there are still many classic cars seen rusting in old houses or being taken apart for scrap metal. It would be advisable for people to think about acquiring the cars and bring them back to life.

# THE LONGEST PAINTING: TRANSCENDING INSPIRATION

by *Daniel Semere*



**W**e are living in a world inundated with so many challenges. From the economy and financial melt downs to nuclear armament; from regional wars to immigration, the global problems have proliferated and they have become very difficult to solve. The actions individual nations take affects the world in general and this automatically makes the problems and challenges of nations interdependent. And one of the pervasive challenges of the world today is the issue of environment. Indeed climate change is the first issue that is truly global that no one can get away from as everybody is at risk. Breaking news like flooding, the melting of the poles, the rising of the sea level and the consequent sinking of coastal areas, ozone depletion, no more come as a surprise. It is repeatedly said that global warming may be the first challenge in history that human societies across the globe should act upon together as it is a shared threat. All these challenges necessitate the need for a coordinated global effort and political will for their effective solution. And as the nature and the most important characteristic of most of these problems is that they put the future in danger, it automatically entails the need for awareness from everybody; and especially the youth.

That's why the longest painting in the world which was accomplished by Eritrean youth organized under the NUEYS, was given the theme "Pollution Free world". Although the project was carried out having as the final objective of putting it in the Guinness World

Record book, its representational effect has far more implication in terms of its theme and participants and also its associated significance. In this respect, the longest painting has tried to address the issue of one of the most important challenges of the world, which is environmental pollution. Moreover, the fact that the task was done by the youth has symbolically represents the solution for such a global challenge lies on the awareness we should create on the youth, who are the future of the world.

The power possessed by youth is a recognized force at all time. And its significance is that their energy can be used for both constructive and destructive purposes. This is what makes the youth at the centre of any equation. And if their potential is tapped adequately and is brought together, our massive youth power can work wonders in any endeavour we take on. And what makes youth associations all over the world important in any task is their representation of the active force of the youth. As medium where many talents of the youth come together youth associations are often areas where promising futures are conceived. And it is the painting clubs under NUEYS that has taken up on the task of accomplishing the longest painting in the world which was successfully completed.

This painting with the theme "pollution free world", live up to Eritrea's belief and commitment to deal with the global challenge of Environment through the involvement of a consciously aware, organized and dedicated youth. Eritrea has a vested interest in protecting the environment. And this has historical reasons. Due to colonialism Eritrea had not been the owner of its own affairs. And the

direct result of this take its toll in the socio-economic, political, cultural, and environmental aspects of the country. So at independence Eritrea had to start from the scratch. And now that it has taken its matter on its hand, the long road for reconstruction of the country has begun. And this was with the rich experience of the successful struggle for independence that assured that nothing is impossible if there is a conscious and organized youth ready to make the sacrifice for the objectives in the best interest of the society. Many progresses have therefore been achieved in various fields like education health, infrastructure, and other social sectors. One of the major priorities of Eritrea is the environment as it is directly linked with the core principles and values of the country and the government. The major endeavour of the nation which includes social justice, self-reliance, and food security has a lot to do with the environment. The majority of the Eritrean people live in rural areas engaged on agriculture which is affected by the environment for better or worse. Hence, much has been invested to protect the environment through soil and water conservation efforts, terracing, constructing dams and check dams, planting of trees, environmental awareness efforts and so on.

What made the longest painting unique is its symbolical and representational nature. Just as the project represents the message of raising awareness by involving the youth (the most important players) to the world's most urgent and important problem (environmental pollution); it also symbolizes the need for unity both in Eritrea and the world by involving children from the 6 regions of Eritrea and from both genders. The theme of the painting was divided into seven continuous and interrelated phases that give complete pictures about the trends and processes affecting our environment and the effort needed to create the ideal environment free from pollution. Each phase

was represented in around one kilo meter of painting.

All along the process of painting the works of the children were constantly inspected and followed by the five witnesses. As the task, it was known, would take a long time, it would be difficult for personnel of Guinness to follow the work from the beginning to the end. And hence, as per the requirement of the Guinness World Record, a valid work should have the account of at least two witnesses of whom one should be a professional in the area or field of the task that is being attempted. These witnesses should be influential persons in various fields and in no way should be affiliated with the body or institution attempting the task, in this case the NUEYS.

On Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2011 the painting was staged at the outskirts of the capital on the road from Asha Golgol through Hmberti. In the ceremony where different government officials, religious leaders, diplomats and invited guests were present the measurement was conducted. The task of the measurement was carefully done for about 5 hours by experts. And the measurement was confirmed by the witnesses to be 7.166 km long, the longest painting in the world. It put Eritrea in the nomination for Guinness World Record book.

The event is indeed significant at different levels. The task of the Longest Painting is a manifestation of the growth and organization of the arts club and it proved that it has put the skill, dedication and perspective of the youth to a whole new level and beyond. It created a conducive atmosphere where the painters mainly the youth and children would be able to exercise and express their artistic talents for a noble objective. The project also stands as a testimony to NUEYS's living up to its responsibility and expectation in the task of developing the



youth and organizing them towards the issue of utmost urgency and importance. There is no doubt that the painting has left a deep impression on the participants that anything is possible; even fighting pollution. Materializing such a long painting with such a big effort on their part is certainly a source of inspiration, instilling in their receptive mind that nothing is impossible and out of reach if you come together, define your problem, put your mind to it, and work hard. Isn't that what the world needs for its challenge one of which is saving our environment? Such a lesson and message in the heart of our future generation is indeed the strong point made by the project. Moreover it has proved that guided activism bears fruits and enables inspiration to transcend across the world.

Daniel Semere, is a researcher at Research and Documentation Center, he is also a columnist in Eritrean profile.

# “ABASHAWL: WHERE THE CITY’S REAL HEART BEAT LIES...”

by *Meron Abraba*



Just the other day I had the opportunity to accompany Samuel and Weini, a soon-to-be-married couple to Cherhi, the beautiful restaurant perched on top of a hill, in the Aba

Shawl area of Asmara. On our way back, we made a brief detour to one of the ale houses, where my friends enjoyed a *melelik* of *suwa* each. Back in the US, where they have lived for the last 25 years or so, they had heard of Aba Shawl and the great communal life.

When we got home later, Samuel asked me if I knew anything about the history of Aba Shawl. Apparently, his elder siblings back in the US also wanted to know why it was so important that a song be made of it.

That got me wondering: I didn't know the story myself, not the whole part anyway. So I began digging and the first thing that came to my mind was to refer the book by Yishak Yosief entitled *Zanta Ketema Asmera* (History of the

City of Asmara).

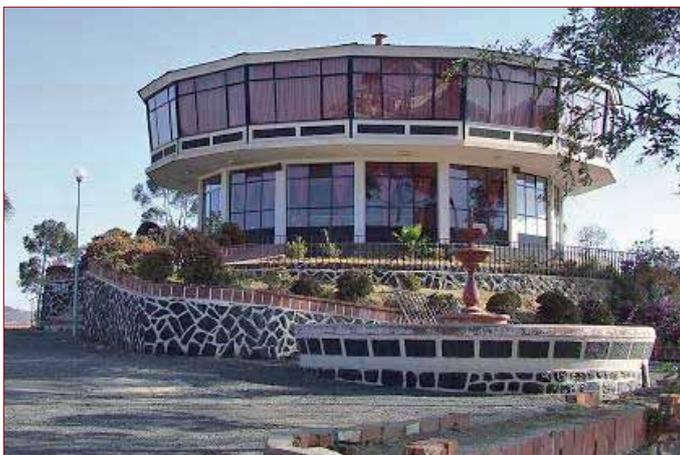
According to the book, "... the hill and the whole area around it known as Cherhi Aba Shawl today was originally called as *Gmbar Aba Awts* and that Shawl was in fact the name of a horse, whose owner had been appointed as sanitation monitor of the area by the Italian administration. The man used to call himself boastfully Abu Shawl (implying owner of Shawl). He had built a hut on the hill and the residents would look up to it and say that's Abu Shawl's house, and through time, the name stuck to the whole neighborhood..."

Italian colonizers formed several urban plans with the core objective to separate the races and sanitize the urban landscape by keeping the natives in a prescribed area. Aba Shawl was proposed for demolition with relocation of the natives further away. That move was not fully realized. Later during the Ethiopian colonization, however, the city administration decided to demolish part of the area to widen the streets. Consequently, many left Aba Shawl and moved to other neighborhoods in Asmara. And that's where the popular song of the early 1970s, *Deban Kuni Aba Shawl* (Farewell Aba Shawl) by renowned Eritrean singer Alamin Abduletif comes in.

*Deban kuni aba shawl  
Selam kɔmi mfraski  
Ade kulu dikba,  
Alayt zektam nerki...*

Roughly translated this goes as

*Farewell Aba Shawl,  
greeting you before you fall  
A mother to all the poor and*



*A caretaker for orphans.*

“... I sang this farewell song because I felt sorry for the people of Aba Shawl who lived in love and harmony. To me destroying Aba Shawl meant destroying the long standing cultural ties, value systems and social fabric of the inhabitants. I felt sorry for the broken hearts and shattered dreams of the young lovers and old acquaintances of that place. Of course, I was not against developmental projects in general but I felt that it should not have been done at the expense of the poor and the needy that were left homeless and uprooted following the demolition project. Fortunately, the demolition work stopped right near my house...” Alamin Abduletif was quoted as saying by Sophia Tesfamariam in her article “Taking in the Sights and Sounds of Abba Shaul.”

Indeed, homes extended to the street side, with the smell of fresh coffee and the variety of sounds – the laughter of children, the clicking of pots and pans, running water and of course, all types of music, all these attest to the lively sense of community of Aba Shawl.

What I’ve put as the title above is a phrase I took from what a certain Edward Dennison wrote about Aba Shawl in his guidebook on Eritrea.

His exact words read: “... Further north, beyond the Market square and Afabet Street, is the old ‘indigenous’ quarter where the houses, to this day, are considerably more modest in their construction and size. The disorganized narrow lanes and humble mud walls of the densely populated dwellings here are by no means a slum. This area known as Abbashaul, is where the local population was herded under the Italian rule and little has been done since to combat the negative impacts that were instilled then. It remains a deprived area, with no running water and poor sanitation, but there is an electrical supply and, above all a very strong sense of community. It is as enjoyable to witness this part of Asmara where the city’s heart

really beats, as it is to the shabby chic aesthetic of the old European quarter.”

Let me part with an extract from the same article by Sophia Tesfamariam:

“...On more than one occasion I had looked at Aba Shawl from my look out point and wondered what lay hidden below the odd patchwork that served as the rooftop for so many homes beneath. There were corrugated metal sheets, stones and mud, wood, tires and other materials spread out over the rooftops, keeping the neighborhood and its secrets well under cover. So what was the secret place below? I could not wait to go there and immerse myself in it all...

Unlike poor neighborhoods in some countries where crime and violence is rampant, Aba Shawl is a poor but it’s a place where camaraderie, compassion, creativity, pride and dignity call home. It is a place you can visit all on your own and not worry about your safety or that of your belongings. I didn’t want to just drop in, I wanted to experience it in its totality and feel completely at home. Visiting with someone who knows the ins and outs of the place or grew up there helps. I got lucky, I got both. I had the pleasure of having my special friend Girmay Yohannes (Sandiago), a veteran fighter and a renowned comedian/historian/linguist/intellectual accompanying me for the day. Sandiago had promised to show me everything that Aba Shawl had to offer and I was ready – I had to see it all and experience it totally. I didn’t know what to expect but I decided to just go with the flow and enjoy myself fully.

Sandiago told me about the many foreign and local artists and writers who come to Aba Shawl seeking inspiration, to live amongst its dwellers and bask in its heartbeat- the joie de vivre that defines Aba Shawl 24-7. Abba Shawul is home to a number of talented and renowned Eritrean artists, musicians and intellectuals. Many trace their roots to this nostalgic neighborhood... For them, Aba Shawl is

not just about the past, but very much of the present, real and emotive, to selfishly guard and defend. Abba Shaul casts a dreamy spell on all whose paths have brought them there.

Many have sung about and written about this beloved neighborhood and there is no doubt that many more will sing her praises in the future. Alamin in his song prided in the sacrifice and contribution of his beloved neighborhood was making towards the beautification of Asmara. For him and others like him who have sung about this place, it was not about the real estate as much as it was about the aura, the

sounds rather than the sights, the welcoming neighborliness and the optimism and fervor of those carving out deep and meaningful lives amongst the poverty and meager stone dwellings. The fear of Aba Shawl's gentrification still exists today and residents there tell me that they are afraid that developments in the area would destroy Aba Shawl's distinct historical character and charm... I agree. It would be close to being sacrilegious for Aba Shawl is a living phenomenon and not simply a place of multiple dwellings packed one on top of the other...".



Meron Abraha, is journalist and web chief editor for Shaebia.org.



Foto Lusci