

History of Hadiya state and Hadiya political struggles for self-rule

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1. Background

The Hadiya nation constitutes one of the indigenous ethno-linguistic and cultural peoples in the Horn of Africa with collective consciousness, unique culture, language (Hadiyyisa), traditions, way of life, and nationhood. Hadiya people are descendants of Highland East Cushitic family. The area occupied by the Hadiya proper (living in the area between Gibe and Bilate river basins) and groups of Hadiya descents extends from the upper Gibe in the west to the bend of Wabi Shebelle in the east. Hadiya Kingdom, also known as the Hadiya Sultanate, was one of the well-documented seven principalities in the Horn of Africa between 12th and late 16th centuries. The Hadiya people in Hadiya zone (Hadiya proper) are the scattered remnants of a formerly much larger ethnic complex under the once-mighty Muslim principality called Hadiya Sultanate. A historical definition of the Hadiya people and people of Hadiya descent based on the old Hadiya sultanate included a number of Ethiopian ethnic groups currently known by other names. Currently, this historic entity is subdivided into a number of ethnonyms, partly with different languages and cultural affiliations. In his book "A History of the Hadiya in Southern Ethiopia," Ulrich Braukämper, a prominent German anthropologist, reported that Leemo, Weexo-giira (Baadogo, Haballo, Bargaago, Waayabo, Hayyibba, Hoojje and Hanqaallo), Sooro, Shaashoogo, Baadawwaachcho, and Libido (Maraqo) Hadiya subgroups remain a language entity and preserved identity of oneness, the Hadiya proper. In contrast, Qabeena, Halaaba, Welene and Gedebano, and Silt'e people developed separate ethnic identities. Clans of Hadiya origin in Oromia, Sidama, Wolayta, Gurage, Tigray (Rayyaa, Azaaboo, and Ashaange), and Afar were completely absorbed by these nations. They were initially all inhabitants of a single political entity, a sultanate, which in the four centuries following its break-up in the 16th century fragmented into separate ethnic groups.

Richard Burton, Maurice, Phillip Lebel, Ulrich Braukämper, Mohammed Hassen, Travis J. Owens, and others documented that Hadiya sultanate was a rich state and was a member of the Zeila Port Federation in the 14th century, had trade relations with Arabia, Asian and European countries. Arab historian, Shihab al-Din al-'Umari (1300– 1349), referred to Hadiya as a rich, the largest and militarily the most powerful Muslim state among the seven states of the Muslim federation of Zeila. Hadiya Sultanate had its own currency, known as Akuna, around the 14th century. Between 13th-16th centuries, the expansionist Abyssinian Empire sought to seize control of the fertile land and trade route of Hadiya and other Muslim states such as Ifat and Adal. Hadiya formed the backbone of Muslim opposition against Abyssinian expansion for almost two centuries (1270-1555). The earliest surviving mention of Hadiya is in the Kebra

Nagast, indicating that the kingdom was in existence by the 13th century. Another early mention is in a manuscript written on the island monastery of Lake Hayq, which states that after conquering Damot, Emperor Amda Seyon I proceeded to Hadiya and brought it under his control using Gura armies from modern day Eritrea which would later become Gurage people. Later during Amda Seyon's reign, the King of Hadiya, Amano, refused to submit to the Emperor of Ethiopia. Amda Seyon subsequently set forth for Hadiya, where he "slew the inhabitants of the country with the point of the sword," killing many of the inhabitants while enslaving others. Absence of strong successors to Amda Sion provided the Muslim States almost a century in which to re-organize their power. Hadiya once again emerged as a cohesive unit. Its army was estimated at 40,000 horsemen and double the amount of foot soldiers. Hadiya formed the backbone of Muslim opposition against Abyssinian expansion for almost two centuries (1270-1555).

The war between Abyssinian Empire and Muslim states intensified during the reign of Emperor Zara Yaqobb (1434-1468). Initially, the Muslims were under the leadership of Arue Badlai, King of Adal. Badlai was killed but Muslim resistance was sustained by Garaad Mahiko, a sultan of Hadiya. Garaad Mahiko succeeded in setting up Hadiya as an independent Hadiya state again. However, Garaad Mahiko was deposed in favor of his uncle Baamo. Garaad Mahiko then sought sanctuary at the court of the Adal Sultanate. Garaad Mahiko was later slain by mercenaries employed by Zara Yaqob, who had been in pursuit. The chronicles record that the leader of mercenaries, Adal Mabrak, sent Mahiko's head and limbs to Zara Yaqob as proof of his death. After militarily occupying Hadiya, many kings and high-ranking members of Abyssinia forcefully married Hadiya women; Queen Eleni of Hadiya is one example. This would result in wars with neighboring Adal Sultanate, who did not take kindly to the atrocities committed by Ethiopia against its fellow Muslim Hadiya state. Ethiopian and Adal relations continued to sour after the Hadiya incident and reached its peak at the Ethiopian–Adal war, Hadiya would join the Adal armies in its invasion of Ethiopia during the 16th century.

Continued hostility between the Abyssinian Empire and its Muslim neighbors eventually led to the greatest armed conflict in the Horn of Africa between the Abyssinian Empire and Muslim forces from 1529 to 1543. Hadiya was one of the nations involved in the 14 years of devastating war between Abyssinia and the Muslim states led by Imam Ahmad. Despite the victories in the early years, Imam Ahmad and most of his army were killed in repeated attacks by the Abyssinian army supported by Portuguese conscripts and modern arms garnered from European allies. Hadiya and Harla forces, led by Hadiya leaders Garaad Aze and Garaad Jafar, were defeated in a series of battles against Emperor Sarsa Dengel. Garaad Jafar was

killed in action around present day Lake Zeway and the Hadiya state fall apart, unable to defend the territory. Following Hadiya state collapse, Hadiya people were dispersed in several directions and most people were assimilated with other communities. Despite the fall of Hadiya sultanate in late 16th century, the scattered remnants of Hadiya nation settled in Bilate and Gibe river basins, regrouped and maintained an autonomous existence under the leadership of decentralized tribal and community chiefs between 17th and late 19th centuries. However, since Emperor Minelik's army took control of the Hadiya region in the 1890s, Hadiya nation has been forcibly stripped of its right to self-government. Even in what is now called the Hadiya Zone (Hadiya proper), the Hadiya nation has over 5 million population. Although Hadiya is the 7th most populous nation among over 80 distinct nations and language groups in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Empire has deprived Hadiya nation's historic right to territorial self-governance arrangement.

According to Carlo Conti Rossini, Enrico Cerulli, Tadesse Tamrat, Merid Wolde Aregay, Markakis, Abbink and others, the current Ethiopian Empire originates from the Abyssinian Empire, first founded mainly by Amhara and Tigray in the north. Since the medieval period, the Abyssinian Empire expanded its tiny territory in the north to vast areas in central, eastern, western, and southern parts of contemporary Ethiopia. Contemporary Ethiopia was formed through military conquest, subjugation, and imperial expansion into formerly independent nations and nationalities such as the Oromo, Somalis, Hadiya, Kambata, Sidama, Wolaita, Afar, and Kafa, among others, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Historically, these nations were autonomous and ruled their territories for centuries. The Horn of Africa was formerly littered with Kingdoms, Sultanates, and Dynasties, most of which have now disappeared. Contemporary Ethiopia is inherently a multinational, multilingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country comprising over 80 ethnic groups. However, the chauvinist Ethiopianist ruling elite never considered the conquered nations as equal stakeholders. The conquered and incorporated nations have been excluded from political and economic decision-making and remained only second-class citizens.

Different ethnic groups and communities in the country have had fundamental differences in the foundational principle of the Ethiopian nation-state itself. Ever since the formation of contemporary Ethiopia in the 19th century, the political landscape in Ethiopia is divided between unitarist Ethiopian political elites who want to maintain assimilationist imperial nation-state building project under the banner of 'one culture, one language, and one religion' of the past and most Ethiopian nations who define Ethiopia as a federation of nations where each nation retain certain level of autonomy while ceding some power to the center. Ethiopia's fundamental political, economic, and social problem emanates from the

central government's contempt to treat over 80% of the Ethiopian population equally. There are apparent ideological differences in political decision-making power allocation between regions and the central government and between ethnicities and central government. These divisions reflect deep cracks in the underlying beliefs about the roles of the central government and regional governments. These opposing visions of Ethiopia remain the cause of non-ending conflict in the Horn of Africa with devastating consequences. The key political question of the Ethiopian nations, nationalities, and peoples is realizing and implementing their own vision, goals, and objectives. However, the racist, discriminatory, and divisive authoritarian state could not respect the sovereignty, identity, language, religion, and culture of nations, nationalities, and ethnic groups. Therefore, Ethiopia's political crisis is rooted in a long-standing conflict between attempts to build a centrist authoritarian state and nations, and nationalities who want to build a modern Ethiopian republic that equally treats all peoples politically, economically, and socially. These fundamentally different political visions have not been redressed, although the imperial era ended in 1974 and a constitution centered on a multinational federal system was adopted in 1995.

2. History of Hadiya's political struggle to regain the right to self-determination since the advent of modern Ethiopian state

2.1. 1870s–1991

The nations in southern Ethiopia have been fighting both individually and collectively for justice and equality against subjugation and oppression of the centrist authoritarian Ethiopian Empire. In the late 19th century, the forces of Emperor Minelik, armed with modern weapons, waged a campaign to seize control of the southern nations, nationalities, and peoples at the expense of their political and economic interests. Although Emperor Minelik set out to conquer the south within a short period, the southern nations, nationalities, and peoples did not easily submit to Emperor Minelik's ambition for annexation to the Ethiopian Empire. For example, the people of Qabena Hadiya fought a fierce battle with Minelik's army for six years (from 1867 to 1875) until they were conquered in 1889. Thousands of Hadiya perished in the resistance struggle. Since Hadiya was conquered by Minelik's army, led by Gobena Dache, Hadiya people have been fighting the feudal system using guerrilla tactics. During the Italian occupation, Hadiya and the Arsi-Oromo were among the fiercest opponents to Ethiopian rule. Ulrich Braukemper noted that all Hadiyya groups, particularly the Shaashoogo, Leemo, Sooro and Baadawwaachcho, adopted an antagonistic attitude towards the Habasha occupation, which erupted into an open conflict in 1936. Abägaz Gedecho Hemacho was one of the self-appointed Hadiya leaders, along with Abagaz Baddigo and

Abagaz Agisho Erjabo, who mobilized the people of Hadiya and Kambata and was able to raise the standard of rebellion (locally known as the Gädecho Mekemekato or Ulbich Qäsha) in 1936 against the Shawan conquerors. Ulrich Braukämper chronicled eyewitness account that Leemo-Hadiya, who allegedly had over a hundred rifles at their disposal, supported by Kambaata warriors overran most of the garrison settlements, but they were unable to take control of the strongly fortified administrative compound at Hossana. In May 1936, the Baadawwaachcho, with the support of combatants from the rest of the Hadiyya tribes, defeated imperial troops led by fitawrari Tamrat and chased them up to the vicinity of the Catholic mission station of Waato in Kambata territory.

Hadiya youth were at the forefront of the students' revolution of the 1970s. Abiyo Ersamo was one of the key leaders of the student movement and one of the founders of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). He made significant contributions to the revolution in Ethiopia. Girma Bekele is another exemplary Hadiya martyr. During the Red Terror /Key Shibir/ in Derg regime, thousands of Hadiya heroes have been butchered in several locations in the country. In early 1980s, 36 unarmed Hadiya youth who demanded justice and equality for Hadiya people were shot at point-blank range on the cliff of Ajora waterfall.

While previous Hadiya struggles have had their own measures of success, one might wonder why Hadiya's political struggle has not developed in the same level as the political struggles of other nations such as the Tigrayans and the Oromos. To find answers, it is important to examine historical factors. Two fundamental factors appear to have stunted the political struggle of the Hadiya nation. In the 1970s, the nations in Ethiopia that framed their nations' political vision in light of the right of nations to self-determination managed to build their political struggle on solid foundations. While some Hadiya scholars had faith in the right of nations to self-determination in the 1970s, they did not articulate a clear political vision and the road map for Hadiya nation.

Furthermore, the Derg Red Terror massacred many Hadiya nationalist scholars of the 1970s. Few members of EPRP and The All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON) Hadiya scholars survived the Red Terror of the Derg. However, the survivors of red terror in the two groups focused on infighting over ideological differences. The surviving members of the EPRP worked hard to transform Hadiya political struggle in the image of centrist imperial politics. The EPRP members unrealistically believed that Hadiya can achieve its group rights within the reformed assimilationist unitary system. Other Hadiya scholars,

who were members of MEISON in the 1970s, shaped Hadiya politics in line with divisive clannish politics rather than inclusive Hadiya nationalism. Therefore, the failure to define the root causes of Hadiya's political, economic, and social problems and lack of a realistic roadmap are the major shortcomings of previous Hadiya political struggles. The current roadmap emphasizes Hadiya self-reliance and self-determination, as opposed to empty expectation of reforming assimilationist Ethiopian empire. Hadiya people and people of Hadiya descent should secure their rights by creating political and cultural organizations that serve their interests. Hadiya should have power over their own schools, businesses, community services, and local government.

2.2. 1991-2018

The political struggle for justice and equality continued with Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government, notably through the Hadiya National Democratic Organization (HNDO) party. A lot of Hadiya people made great sacrifices for Hadiya rights. Hadiya zone became the country's first and only zonal administrative unity where a popular opposition party defeated the ruling EPRDF. The HNDO won all parliamentary seats and, and controlled the zonal government. However, the people's hope for true self-rule was quickly dashed by the vengeful brutal tactics of EPRDF against the Hadiya people. In the 2000 national and the subsequent local elections alone, 23 Hadiya Nation Democratic Organization members and supporters were killed. The HNDO with negligible parliamentary seats was unable to influence state policy, and no tangible benefit transpired to the people of Hadiya because the ruling EPRDF party maintained the unconstitutional centralized rule. This generated political apathy in Hadiya, which is helpful for preservation of the status quo. The risk of symbolic victory for the minority party in a setting where the main political cleavage is ethnic is acute because the dominant party rarely depends on the minority party in the legislature, thus depriving the latter of the leverage.

2.3. Since 2018 to date

Following the regime change in 2018, Hadiya people fought for the right of Hadiya nation to self-determination, led by Hadiya youth (Kabeera) movement. The Hadiya youth struggle for Hadiya statehood is the continuation of the struggle of the previous generations of Hadiya for regaining Hadiya's lost power. The struggle has been rooted in nonviolent resistance principles and the nation's lived experience. The literal meaning of the term "Kabeera" is a leopard. Leopards are traditionally admired for their courage, power, intelligence, and tenacity. The term is used to symbolize Hadiya youth as a group because of the belief that the youth embodies the attributes of a leopard and continues the struggle for the nation's survival. Following sustained Hadiya youth demand for Hadiya statehood, Hadiya National Assembly unanimously approved Hadiya people to exercise their constitutional right to self-determination in November 2018. The decision was submitted to the House of Representatives of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Region (SNNPR) to facilitate referendum pursuant to article 47(3/b) of the FDRE Constitution.

Along with the question of Hadiya statehood, a lot of work has been done to promote political empowerment of the Hadiya people. Hadiya youth realized that the secret to the success of any ethnonational political struggle is a strong and inclusive nationalist mindset. Since 2018, Hadiya Kabeera members have made relentless efforts to instill an inclusive Hadiya nationalist mindset among Hadiya youth. Over the three years, Kabeera members have been teaching the history of Hadiya, the truth about the Hadiya people in Ethiopia, the background of Hadiya's struggle and heroism, Hadiya culture, etc. The struggle for Hadiya's right to self-determination has also helped revive brotherhood among groups of Hadiya sub-groups such as Mareko and Qabena, who have been detached from Hadiya proper for several decades. Hadiya's political struggle is gradually re-gaining ground.