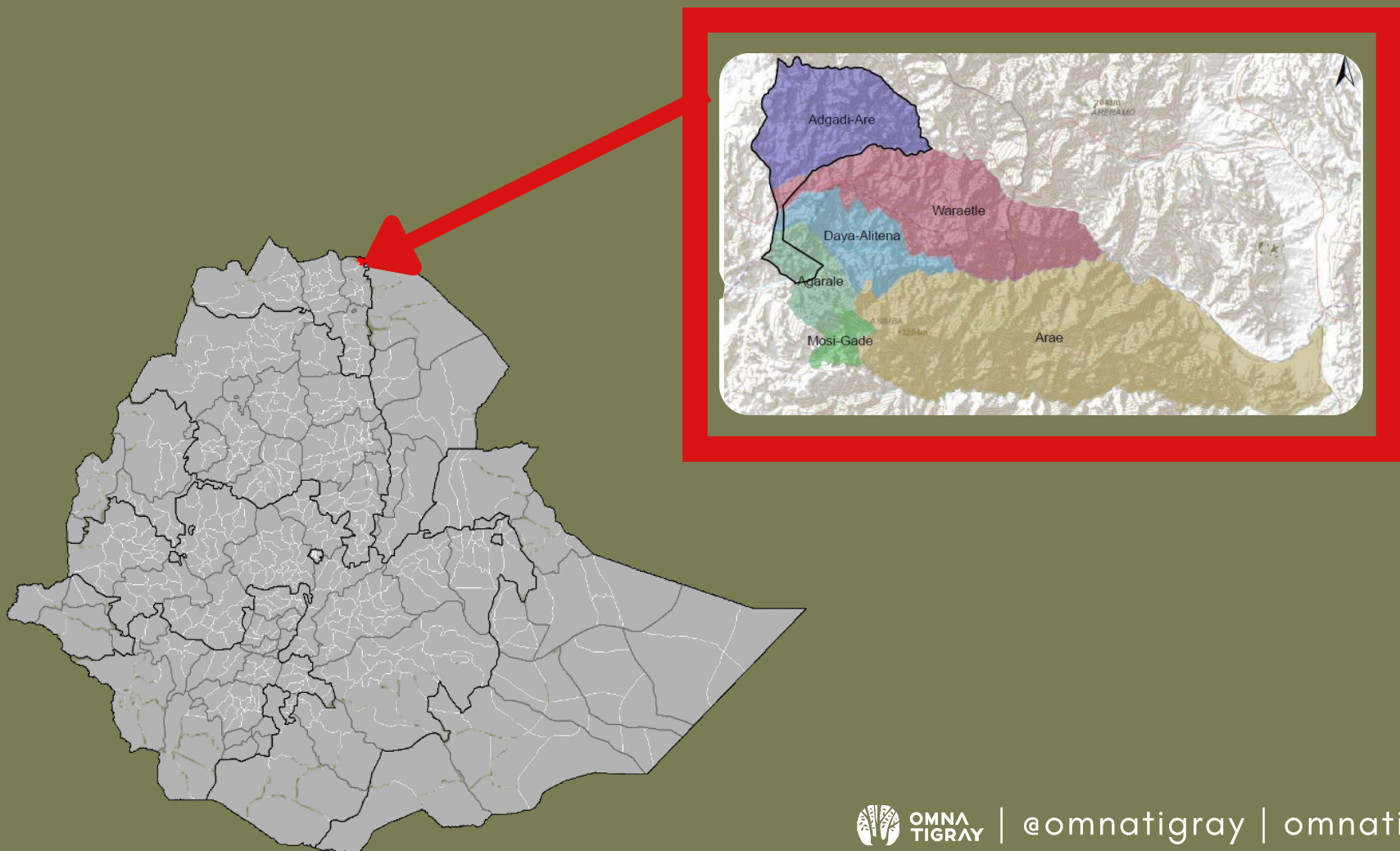


The Irob

EXPLAINED>

Where is Irob?

- Irob, also referred to as Irobland or Adi Irob (ዓዲ ኢሮብ/ኢሮብ ዲክ) in Tigrigna/Saho, is located in the northeastern part of Tigray. It borders Eritrea to the north, Ethiopia's Afar region to the east, and the remainder of Tigray to the southwest. Irob is part of a region in northeastern Tigray historically called Agame, which had Adigrat as its capital.
- In Ethiopia's modern day, pre-Tigray war administrative system, Irob was Irob woreda (Irob District) with Dahwan as its capital.



Who Are the Irob People?



- The Irob, who inhabit mountainous semi-arid lands, are one of the two smallest minority groups in Tigray. Population estimates are between 30,000 and 40,000.
- The people of Irob speak Saho, a Cushitic language. They have become a bilingual community with most Irob also speaking Tigrigna.
- Irob is traditionally divided into three main ethnic subgroups: Adgadi-Are, Bouknaiti-Are, and Hasaballa; Adgadi-Are and Hasaballa are predominantly Orthodox Tewahido Christians, while Bouknaiti-Are are mainly Catholics.
- Irob communities' livelihood stems from rainfed agriculture and animal husbandry.
- At the height of their productivity, Adi Irob provided some of the best quality honey, livestock, and dairy products to the region. Dating back to the mid-century, the region rapidly became one of the most degraded locations in Tigray due to droughts and other environmental and ecological factors.
- Historically, the people of Irob have had a strong belief in their political and individual autonomy and its defense. They have also had pride in being part of Ethiopia which has been illustrated by their steadfast defense of Ethiopia throughout history. **Their autonomy as well as their place in Ethiopian statehood continues to be challenged to this day during the ongoing genocidal war in Tigray.**

Irob Culture



- Like any culture, Irob is unique, but is also influenced by the cultures of the neighboring regions. Irob is located between two culturally distinct societies: the highland Christians and the lowland Muslims, all of whom live together in peace.
- Irob's location allowed for cultural interaction with these two populations and though the Irob share a language with their lowland neighbors (the Saho), they share their main lineage roots and hence more cultural elements with their Tigrigna speaking highland neighbors.
- Such elements include religion, food, folklore, marriage customs, social organization, and more specifically, the Woldu-Subagadis customary laws, foods like Tihlo, and drinks such as the original honey wine, 'Mess.'
- Despite sharing a close connection with their southern neighbors, there are specific cultural elements unique to the Irob and linked to their historic and continuous struggle to protect and defend their identity. This includes:
 - Relatively democratic, self-contained and elaborate customary laws through which they resolve issues and disputes within their community;
 - An egalitarian electoral system in which power largely rests with the public assembly which in turn is delegated to a council of elders;
 - Relatively democratic familial relationships and active and socially recognized role of women in the community.

A Brief History of Irob

- The most consistent and popular accounts of Irob oral history indicate Semitic origins. Irob's main lineage is traced back to Endreas the Great, the son of King Megdir of Rome and Queen Eleni of Israel, one of the 12 people who came to Axum with the Arc of the Covenant. Their descendants settled in current Irob.
- Irob had been fairly autonomous until the 1820s when a Hasaballa Irob leader, Dj. Subagadis ruled the entire region of Tigray (including part of current day Eritrea) from 1818 to 1831.
- This centralized rule faced opposition from autonomy-seeking Irob with whom Subagadis ended up negotiating a peace deal. In the deal, the central government recognized the Irob elected leaders in exchange for recognizing his authority in the form of paying taxes twice a year. This arrangement lasted roughly until the early period of Emperor Haile Selassie's rule.
- The 19th century also saw the introduction of Catholicism to Irob and with it, the founding of the first school in Ethiopia's modern/formal education history.
- In 1845, as soon as Catholic missionaries, led by Saint Justin de Jacobis from Italy, established roots in the area, they built a school (Lideta) in Alitena, a town in central Irob. It was successful with a strong curriculum and students attending from locations as far as Showa and Harar.
- Irob leaders made contributions to the defense of the Ethiopian Empire and to the revolutionary movements against Haile Selassie and the Derg.

The 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrean “Border” War

- Until 1998, there had been relative peace and strong socio-political integrity in Irob despite being subjected to the centralized administration of Ethiopia and losing much of its autonomy. That changed in May of 1998 when Eritrean Armed Forces invaded Irob as well as other parts of Northern and Western Tigray.
- The war that lasted from 1998 to 2000 saw the extremely violent partial occupation of Irob by the Eritrean forces. The violence was almost identical to the war crimes and crimes against humanity occurring in Irob today. The occupation included:
 - Imprisonment, harassment, beatings, and killings of civilians (including priests) and the rape of women and girls;
 - Looting, confiscation and destruction of private property as well as schools, health centers, and churches; systematic cultural destruction and theft of relics;
 - Residents evicted from their houses, their livestock and beehives slaughtered or destroyed, and then having to escape to the mountains without food or shelter; and
 - Kidnapping of 97 civilians whose fate is unknown to this day.
- The intention of the Eritrean forces was to systematically destroy and steal all they could, even planting landmines throughout villages to subdue Irob’s strong resistance.
- At the end of this war, an already economically struggling Irob, was disseminated. This led many, especially youth, to migrate from their ancestral home and become refugees across the world, including in other African countries, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

“The invasion and the subsequent cruel treatment of the people have not received enough coverage especially by the new media.”

-- Ethiopian Reporter, Oct. 1998

The Algiers Peace Agreement and Ethio-Eritrean Boundary Commission (EEBC)

- In December 2000, the “border” war ended with the signing of the Algiers agreement. All sides welcomed the peace, however, the resulting establishment of the EEBC to demarcate the border based on colonial treaties led to an existential crisis for the Irob that has yet to be resolved.
- Based on the 2002 ruling of the EEBC, the demarcation would split Irob between Ethiopia and Eritrea leaving about one-third of Irob land ceded to Eritrea. This decision came without consulting the Irob on the ground or reviewing evidence of Irob administrative inclusion in Ethiopia. **This is a violation of international minority as well as indigenous peoples’ rights law.**
- The ruling led to outrage and protest from border populations on both sides, forcing the Ethiopian government to put forth preconditions to accepting the commission’s ruling. The conditions were rejected by the Eritrean government and led to a standstill.
- However, upon taking office, in June 2018 unelected Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s administration announced that it would implement the 2002 border ruling.
- This decision by Abiy Ahmed was followed by several Irob protests against a decision, which would pose an existential threat to them:
 - “This decision will disintegrate the people of Irob” -- Niguse Hagos, Irob District Administrator
 - “We want peace,” said Girmay Abraha, a driver born in the area. “But we believe it shouldn’t come by giving away land.” -- Aljazeera, July 2018
- With the declaration of the war on Tigray in November 2020, the issue of border demarcation is a distant memory and the Irob community is now facing the largest existential threat it has faced in its history.

War on Tigray: An Irob Perspective

- The ongoing genocidal war on Tigray is one that includes international actors, but for Irob this war appears to only include one actor: Eritrean forces. Having yet recovered from the border war and occupation, the people of Irob are once again subjugated to violent occupying Eritrean forces. **This time, however, all of Irob is occupied and the rest of Tigray is either occupied or war-torn, so they have nowhere to escape to.**
- Though information from Irob is extremely limited as a result of an almost complete telecommunications blackout, stories have reached the rest of the world when people have taken the long and dangerous journey on foot to Adigrat or even Mekelle; or when some have managed to reach their loved ones by phone.
- The Irob are yet again going through the unimaginable in the dark. **Geographically isolated, they are suffering out of sight.**
 - As has been true across most of Tigray at one point or another, there is no telecommunication, no transportation, no internet, and no electricity.
 - **“The north is dying,**” said a man from Irob who reached Mekele last month. ‘I strongly believe there is a campaign to target the people. Every public and private institution is looted.’-- AP News, Feb. 11, 2021
 - In addition to the looting of schools, health centers and the destruction and burning of private property, and killing of livestock, the elderly have been beaten, young men have been **massacred**, and women and girls have been **raped**. Proper burials are being prohibited.
 - Generational trauma and violence continue as many of those who have been killed since November 2020 are the children of men and women killed or abducted by Eritrean forces during the 1998-2000 border war.
- To put it succinctly, **“nothing at all”** remains of life pre-occupation.

In Memoriam of Irob Lives Lost

Andreas Tesfay Fusuh · Kahsay Hailu Fusuh · Tesfay Hailu Fusuh · Musie Abraha Zigta · Teodros Fusuh Zigta · Samora Fusuh Zigta · Aaron Desta Zigta · Awet Desta Kahsay · Abraha Tesfay Fusuh · Aguya W/gebriel Tesfay · Abrahaley Tesfay Woldu · Samuel Tesfay Hailu · Samuel Suba Tesfay · Eyob Tesfay Medhin · Samuel Suba Tesfahom · Abraha Sibhat Awala · Mulune Hais Tesfay · Fesseha Hagos Zigta · Ghirmay Abrah Tesfay · Tesfay Hagos Fusuh · Hagos Berhe Tesfay · Fusuh T/Yohans Tesfay · Filmon Dirar Hagos · W/Gebriel T/Giorgis · Beniam Mehari Hais · Desta Beyene Tesfay · Kahsay Sibhat Kahsay · Ghirmay Kahsay Sibhat · Rezene Tesfay Zigta · Ashenafi Hallibo Teka · Sifa Hagos Teka · Mohamed Ibrahim Ali · Ibrahim Umar · Adagis Hagos Fusuh · W/gebriel T/Giorgis Fusuh · Biniyam Mehari Hais · Ghiday Beyene Bairu · Gaim Sibhat Ghiday · Huluf Beyene Ghebrai · Zewditu Tesfay Damana · Hagos Gofar Ghebrai · Hagos Abraha Ghebru · Hagos Alema Tesfay · Abraha Ghebray Sibhat · Baraki Woldu Dabasay · Tsegay Buru Ghebru · Yonas Negasi Ghirmay · Bereket Hagos Berhe · Abraha Hagos Sibhat · Fesehaye Tesfay Ghebray · Abadi Niguse Ado-Ali · Hagos Dabasay G/Selassie · Tesfay Hagos Dabasay · Teum Hagos Dabasay · Hagos Abraha Kahsay · Solomon Abraha Kahsay · Amanuel Araya Hagos · Mehari Tesfay · Mebrahtom Lemlem Fitwi · Kibrom Woldu H/mariam · Halefom G/Selassie Tikue · Dawit Mezgebo Ghebray · Hagosa Abraha Hawku · Hailu Kahsay Hagos · Sibhat Debesu Kahsay · Abadi Nuguse Sibhat · Tesfay Fushuh Hagos · Desta Nuguse Tesfay · Solomon* · Woldu Buru Ghebrai · Halefom Tekle Tesfay · Nahom Kiflo G/Egziabihier · Tewelde Tadesse Tesfay · Yonas Tadesse Tesfay · Elias W/Gebriel Hagos · Alem Tesfau Zewde · Hadish Tesfau Zewde · Fetsum Tesfau Zewde · Meles Negusse · Abraha T/haimanot G/aregawi · Tesfay Hadish Kidanu · Hagos Alema G/Tsadiq · Angesom (wedi Ageray) · Tesfay G/Egziabihier · Bokre Tesfay Goisu · G/Yohans Desta · Nega Tesfay · K/mariam Teferi · Hadish H/mariam · Gebre Atsibeha · Hagos Hailu · Kidane T/Haimanot · Berhane G/Aregawi · Ghirmay Neguse G/yohans · Mikias Ghirmay Negusse · Berhe Desta W/Gebriel · Tsigab Alem Fitwi · Desalegn Tesfa Hagos · Atakliti Meles G/Mariam · Mehret Gebrezigi · Etay Zahafta G/mariam · Hadega Lema · Kahsa Gebre · Kidane Reda · Kidan Woldu · Letay Gebremariam · Berhane G/Tsadiq Baraki · Angesom G/Selassie · Berhane G/Selassie · BokreTSION Desta · Desta Alem Ghirmay · Abrehet Teumzgi · Tesfay G/Selassie · Desalegn Kahsay · Berhane Gebreyesus · Bokre Tesfay Fissuh

- The Irob Advocacy Association has worked hard on the ground to gather a list of those massacred in Irob. Massacres have occurred across Irob, where some whole families are being killed. As of early April, 116 have been recorded as murdered in over 20 villages, including Gamma-Daa, Alitena, Fredashum, Gietelo, Magauma, Awo, and Mosi-Gade.
 - This number is likely a small fraction of those who have been killed, as conditions on the ground make information difficult to verify.
- **How to Support the Irob people**
 - Share and amplify this post
 - Follow the Irob Advocacy Association on Twitter @IrobAdvocacy
 - Follow Irob Development Association on Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Irobdevelopment.org/>
 - Join Omna Tigray's Irob Twitter campaign, starting on April 10, 2021
 - Sign our petitions advocating for special protection, minority rights and the removal of Eritrean troops from Tigray

Stay Involved OMNA TIGRAY



@omnatigray | omnatigray.org

#TigrayGenocide, #AllowAccessToTigray, #IrobMassacre

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