

IS THE PUBLIC WRATH TOWARDS THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST ERITREA'S SOVEREIGNTY REALLY AN ILL-DIRECTED OVER-REACTION?

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A deplorable campaign of arrogance, disrespect, open boast, belittling, dehumanization, demoralization, and the ranting of incoherent outbursts against the sovereignty of Eritrea by the Ethiopian chauvinist expansionists, has neither been something new journalist Tamirat Negra has started, nor an issue Eritreans are supposed to be shocked over. In truth, the campaign to demoralize, erode morale, confidence and hope was always there but the difference being: the journalist just made it worse.

As usual, many articulate, credible, and intelligent patriot Eritreans, with stellar reputations, have shown, with honour and dignity, the absurdity and shallowness of his arguments, depth of his racist thoughts and sheer ignorance. Cooler heads among the Ethiopians, who condemned his approach as a dangerous provocation, also replied to him in different tones, with some of them even harsher than those of many Eritrean responders. In addition to that, there were the majority of the responders who took a cue from the cheap approach of insult and humiliation of the journalist. That is something we discourage in principle, though understandable in this particular case, when we consider the extraordinary cost our people had paid for the sovereignty on which he declared the new round of the campaign, and the image he displayed about "future" Eritrea of the making of his own evil mind. Sometimes silence is the answer, but he went too far to be ignored: the verbal equivalent to throwing a pie in his face was necessary, and it did happen deservedly so.

The only thing we would find more disturbing and deplorable than the arrogance, conceit and disrespect Tamirat had shown towards the Eritrean people and their sovereign state are the multiple Eritreans who went on the record acting like they

were his defence lawyers, to convince us that he did nothing wrong but stood for the national interests of his country (For lack of better words, I will call them “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans”). As a matter of fact, we are not against the expression of his views on the national interests of his country, but he crossed the acceptable line, with the announcement of his bad intentions sounding like a page from Haileselassie and Mengistu’s playbook.

With the above background laid down, we could move to the questions: ***What were the “concerns” of the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” about the Eritrean citizens who were critical of the journalist? To what extent were those “concerns” justifiable?*** A couple of major “concerns” raised by some, whose presentations I had the chance to watch or their comments to read, were: being emotional and lack of objectivity in their reactions to the Ethiopian journalist. We will have few remarks about each “concern”.

Nobody knows how the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” would expect other Eritreans not to react emotionally to a hostile action, experience, situation or bitter memory. After all, to feel and express emotions is what makes us human being. Maybe what the journalist had said did not make his Eritrean “supporters” feel with emotions, but sorry to say that such situation could only occur when someone is emotionally detached or does not live a fully connected life (I hope no hard feelings). In other words, Eritreans, as other human beings, feel fearful, anxious, angry, loving, surprised, happy, awed or sad, unless there are factors that inhibit the formation and the expression of emotions. Just to help the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” have a second thought about the issue of emotions, we would ask: ***Do family bonds, identity, nationalism, and patriotism, exist in the absence of emotions or are they emotion-free? Why did the Eritrean people raise up arms and fight for 30 years, finally achieving national independence? Could a movement of that size and significance rise and succeed in the absence of emotions?***

Even animals experience emotions and make decisions based on their feelings. In his article, *“Animal Psychology: Complexity of Thought and Emotion”*, Lindsay Wilson shares the following experience:

“From my own experience, my dog has always gotten extremely excited when my family is enthusiastic about something. He will jump up and down, wagging his tail, any time we talk in loud voices excitedly or start laughing about something. Furthermore, when I am sad or another family member looks a little down he will sit down by our sides, and put its head in our laps, looking concerned.”

(<https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/basicproblems002/2015/04/17/animal-psychology-complexity-of-thought-and-emotion/>)

Another issue they raised as a “concern” about Eritrean critics of the journalist was the lack of objectivity in their responses. The term “objectivity” means lack of bias, judgment or prejudice; qualities always demanded from judges, investigators, and researchers. In this particular case, Eritreans were not conducting research or investigation or doing the job of judges. They were simply reacting to something similar to a psychological warfare with the object to disappoint, let down, discourage and cause retreat, exercising their right of defence. Maybe they could be expected to observe objective ethics, a view that sees any action as morally right, wrong or obligatory. However, the questions here are: ***Who sets the rules for what is morally right or wrong?*** Even if we assume that there are rules set: ***Do adhering to those rules and acting in moral and ethical ways only apply to the Eritrean critics of Tamrat?*** We did not hear or read from the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” demanding the same standard from the person they tried to defend, though he lacked grace, civility, and human decency to a level unacceptable to any reasonable person who believes in human dignity. I do not think reasonable minds would differ on the fact that Tamirat sunk too low. That explains the whole reason for the public wrath; an expression of human reaction expected when someone steps on another person’s toe or puts his leg over his head. ***Is that humanly tolerable?***

Many of us still have no insight on the rationale of the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” to defend the Ethiopian journalist. Here we are by no means indicating that we doubt their intention, but we are emphasizing that their one-sided support to the

journalist has unforeseen consequences. Put differently, they skated on pretty thin ice, putting their relations with their people on a precarious situation. ***How did they do that?***

As we saw the “concerns” of the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” on his Eritrean critics, we need to see those of their opponents. This part will answer the question above as follows:

- As the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” did not explicitly show that they had a problem with Tamirat’s attack on Eritrea’s sovereignty and the image of Eritrea he wishes to see, Ethiopian chauvinists, who have argued for three decades that the Eritrean independence was imposed on the Eritrean people would depict that as a green light from Eritreans, whom they would wrongly take as thinking through the prism of Ethiopian expansionists, showing the support for Tamirat as their “Exhibit A”.
- The fact that some went out to support the chauvinist journalist, even if the number is insignificant, opens the appetite of other Ethiopian chauvinists or inspires more verbal attacks with the purpose of influencing the opinions, emotions, attitudes and behaviors of some Eritreans, or the hope of swaying their viewpoints towards their own position. Their desire, in few words, is to see that some abandon the fight to defend Eritrea’s sovereignty. This is of course a fantasy they will never stop to stick to, but the only damage they could cause will not go beyond creating confusion and the attempt to divert our attention, energy and time away from the major struggle against the regime, to an engagement on petty matters. This is still a damage that should not be taken lightly. In simple words, we need to open our eyes very wide, be vigilant and block all possible loopholes (“Nefas Kay Attu”).
- Ethiopian chauvinists are today salivating over the division between Eritreans. Some of us speak or write in support of Tamirat Negera, while others against him. As Eritreans, we should have more important things on our minds than defending a chauvinist, who never wishes anything good for our country and its people, specially at this particular time in which we see conspiracies with our own eyes, though what we see and hear, as compared to what is going on secretly, are bits and pieces, and the players are multiple.

Some may wonder why this issue deserves an article. It is neither about our brothers nor to incriminate them, but about how their support to Tamirat could be received, and what lessons could be learned so that we could move forward with our new wisdom. That is the reason that made the British business magnate, investor, author and philanthropist, Richard Branson (born in July 1950) say:

“You don't learn to walk by following rules. You learn by doing, and by falling over.”

Though we believe that these folks are as honest as any other Eritrean to their country, the act by itself, even if it is a partial support, could be filled with reputational risks. We never thought we would ever see this day we consider a stain in our legacy, as a people having history, pride, and philosophy of our position on what is going on in the region. Simply put, it was flatly unwise to defend the enemy of the country just selecting the sugar-coated parts but overlooking the whole presentation.

Even the regime, which we suspect is behind the journalist, as a face-saving attempt (nothing more and nothing less) it has given a statement, through its ambassador, condemning Tamirat. On the contrary, we never see the “Pro-Tamirat Eritreans” backing down after receiving public feedback. We do not think, at this moment, after their support to the Ethiopian journalist elicited a strong response in the media, they took solace in what they did. However, without upsetting them too much, it could be said that we see they prefer having a permanent mark on record, instead of admitting a mistake. It is unfortunate, but let it be, as long as there are valid lessons to be learned. Nevertheless, the question that should not remain without been raised is: ***Who is responsible for the atmosphere that encouraged Tamirat to attack the country's sovereignty at this particular time?***

This campaign is in fact in line with what the Atse has been saying and doing, in collaboration with Abiy Ahmed. As the result of the atmosphere the Atse has created for them, since the notorious “Peace Agreement”, Ethiopian chauvinists no longer have to hide their motives or measure their words when they talk about Eritrea. Moreover, though we know who is behind it too, for the first time we hear some ignorant Eritrean voices wandering off the right path to demand federation with Ethiopia, as if they did not hear about the UN-sponsored

referendum of 1993 in which the Eritrean people said their final word, and how the results of such internationally-backed referendums become internationally binding. It is disgusting how ignorance and mindlessness could reach that level. Though these hostile developments are not surprising but very depressing, they are additionally compelling pieces of evidence about what the Atse is up to, that the future of our nation depends on his urgent removal and the immediate dismantling of his gang, and that every single day of delay to do all that is actually extremely dangerous for the nation and its future. As some had tried to put it, it is an “Af Arkubu” situation.

With all these developments in mind, every Eritrean is expected to say, write or do something that has teeth to make a positive impact on the struggle to end the rule of the gang. If anything we do, say, or write helps the enemy, even if it was not meant, we are doing so at our own peril. This should be the line we need to draw in the sand, to show the limit beyond which will bring negative consequences for the nation. This approach becomes very necessary because there is no distinct paucity of information about the agony of our people and the struggle going on in and outside the country.

We never give up on our brothers who know that Ethiopian chauvinists want to destroy us from within and that when we fight as a united force we win. Their knowledge, skills, and wisdom are highly in demand at this particular moment. Before we leave it here, we emphasize that though what they did was unwise, we never think they threw their allegiance and obligation to the country to the wind.

Eritrea of the thirty-year war of liberation will never come on its knees before Ethiopia. Though planting the Atse or converting him later into their pawn (as the case may be) is the best investment Ethiopia has ever made in Eritrea, the year 2020 is not a high-flying year for him. We know well that he is not going down alone, but taking with him all his enablers and those led astray. In few words, God is coming for him and his gang. There is nowhere for them to hide: the surprise is coming for them as it did for all dictators without exception. That is the inevitability of history, which no force in the world could stop.

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