

No to Tyrant Afewarki and His PFDJ Ruling Junta

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Background:

The 1993 euphoria of independence in Eritrea dwindled short after its inception and even before it was well grasped by the general public around the world. Contributing factors to this daunting public and global frustration, anger, and out-cry for help by varying opposition ventures are many. Key causes include, but not limited to the following 7-factors: (1) protracted land expropriation by Tyrant Afewarki and his PFDJ ruling junta. (2) Endless national military service programs known as Sawa that overburdened the Eritrean public. (3) Eritrea remains as a divided nation between the highland chauvinists and the marginalized lowland pastoralists. (4) Eritrea is still a nation state in the making; and it is striving to come out of the clouds that overshadow its mere existence as a stable nation state because of the border disputes along the Badme-Tsorena lines against Ethiopia and along the Tajura tracts against Djibouti. (5) Afewarki and his PFDJ ruling junta continue with their banditry acts of expropriating crops and making multitude restrictions on food and other items marketing. (6) The seasonal crop harvest decline due to drought and negligence to take proper care of the arable areas. (7) For most people living in what is known as Eritrea proper, the main problem is lack of affordability due to meager or no cash income. Even the rations that are being supplied through the so called “fair price shops” are distributed occasionally; and with each day that passes, life is becoming extremely severe to cop with.

At the end of the day, viewed from the marginalized Afar, Kunama and other pastoralists’ perspectives, the highland chauvinist, Tyrant Afewarki and his PFDJ ruling junta, don’t know the essence of transparency. And after two decades of formal and informal leadership by Afewarki and his PFDJ ruling junta, the results of democratically managing decisive domestic administrative matters are quite astonishing. Evident enough, both from the chauvinistic highland communities and from the marginalized lowland tracts young escapees (or Sawa refugees) are fleeing away from Afewarki’s PFDJ ruling junta garrisons by thousands. Those who have made it to their home of refuge in Diaspora are no longer concerned with Afewarki and his PFDJ ruling junta. Rather, they are concerned with their own mere survival; and wish to forget the harsh life they left behind inside Eritrea proper. Indeed several of them shockingly express extreme emotions about their harsh experience while within Sawa garrisons and do not want to be reminded of it. This is one of the gloomy features of Tyrant Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta, who promote serious questions in various corners of the globe with deeper implications for Eritrea’s mere existence in the future.

The Highland-Lowland Divide

Last week 3-highlander Tigrinya opposition parties merged into one body against Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta by calling their new united opposition group as Eritrean Movement for Democratic Governance (EMDG). In their message they have not uttered a word about the sufferings and the injustice faced by the marginalized lowland pastoralist societies. On the contrary they took for granted to assume the status quo held thus far by Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta. To them, once they topple Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta from power. They also implicitly guaranteed themselves

(Highlander Tigrinya societies) to automatically form a transitional government; with or without the marginalized pastoralist communities consent. This EMDG view is simply a carbon copy of Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta put in different color and name. But let them know now that the marginalized pastoralist communities (Afar, Kunama and others) are not interested in highlanders' forged highland-lowland-union for creating a would be transitional regime unless its framework reflect our legitimate and human rights or unless their ideas have similar common semblance and resemblance with those we hold near to our hearts.

In my previous article, I have explained why I deeply consider: (1) the basic political and ideological framework of Tyrant Issayas Afewarki and his PFDJ ruling junta as a militaristic group shaped up of highland Christian Tigrinya chauvinism; (2) how this ideology evolved from the start; and (3) how it is posing an existential threat to what we know it today as Eritrea in the making. Tyrant Afewarki, his PFDJ ruling junta, and even those highlanders who claim to be on the opposition side of the political arena are all in common considering for granted that they alone can easily and collectively within themselves sway the marginalized pastoralists and the silent majority of the rural population into their political plat-forms in the name of fabricated and non-existing unity.

By marginalizing pastoralist they hypocritically overlook and even negate the diversity that is solidly evident within Eritrea proper. Tyrant Afewarki, his PFDJ ruling junta and the chauvinist highland opposition groups in common never utter words when it comes to pastoralist culture and social ethos. Nor do they talk of pastoral national issues or even define it in Eritrea's constitution. As a result, their empty cry and call for national unity does not reflect on how to promote an ideal popular democratic constitution. Tyrant Afewarki, his PFDJ ruling junta and the chauvinist highland opposition groups have no basic foundation or structural mechanism for accommodating ethnic and religious diversity within Eritrea proper. Their Christian highland chauvinism is so deeply ingrained in their psychic and social make-up that whenever they gather they can do away with Eritrea's problems by propagating and reiterating their ideology in one form or another and by singing songs of "patriotism" (correctly denoted as songs of banditry and barbaric actions) for hunting, haunting, and hurting our lowland marginalized pastoral communities at large.

Frankly speaking, the highland Tigrinya Christian and the lowland Pastoralist Moslem divide has not yet given chance for Eritrea in the making to blossom and ripen as a full-fledged nation state. The democratic means to unify the highland Tigrinya Christian and the lowland Pastoralist Moslem groups remain quite remote. Particularly, the overwhelming majority Tigrinya chauvinist highlanders manifest by adopting defensive identity alien to the marginalized pastoralist groups. Recently a Kunama organization has accused Afewarki's PFDJ ruling junta by calling it as the Tigrinya regime of genocide. Likewise the Afar organizations along the Red Sea Coastal Areas have accused Afewarki and his PFDJ ruling junta for harassment, intimidation to join forcedly the Sawa garrisons and inhumanly devised harsh handlings by military means. Periodically, red flags and complaints are continuously popping up everywhere from various marginalized pastoralist communities. And yet highland Tigrinya chauvinists in common are hiding their heads under the hot sands; and keep on denying as if nothing is happening within lowland communities in terms of dismay against Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta.

The fact is that, the gap dividing the highland Tigrinya Christian and the lowland Moslem groups remains distinctly visible both at the leadership and at the community levels. The chauvinist Tigrinya highlanders and the marginalized pastoralists have nothing to do with one another; there is nothing in between that holds the two distinct communities together.

Is Afewarki's Eritrea a State or a nation in the making?

As per the Webster Dictionary: "... a nationality is a group of people with a common origin, common traditions, and common language; and that can form a nation state." In my view, as a principle, the very idea of Kaw-miat / Biher / Nationality crafted by Afewarki and his cronies is actually a futile one to think of within Eritrea proper. The way forward for the marginalized lowland pastoralists (Afar, Kunama) and others disenfranchised groups within Eritrea proper is to clearly solidify our own road map before we jump into any kind of highland-lowland-unity bandwagon driven by Tigrinya chauvinist highlanders who have had the opportunity to do so thus far but to our dismays. Highlanders' two-facedness and insincerity put aside, there is no unified Eritrea in an entity where the marginalized pastoralists are taken to remain 2nd class citizens in matters that affect their daily livelihoods and their traditional cultural and religious polity. And on a serious note, I don't think that the hitherto existing nationhood crafted by Afewarki has any substantial basis for its sustained future existence.

Indeed there is hardly any group within Eritrea proper that can satisfy this very definition of nation-state. Looked at from linguistic and other basic human factors, the Tigrinya speakers are made up of about eight sub-groups with no any common origins. For instance, (1) Majority of Hamassein and Akele Guzai highland Christians are Meroni by origin whose ancestor – Meroni came from Dembya in Begemidr – Gondar, deep inside Ethiopia. (2) Majority of the Seraye highland Christians are Adkeme-Melega by origin who came from Lasta and Gojjam tracts inside Ethiopia. (3) The Asmee/Deki-Ishmaelo of Arba'ete Asmera are Asawerta by origin. Likewise, the DekiShihai of LegoChewa (touching upon the Hamassein and Seraye highland tracts) are of the Asawerta origin. (4) The Anganaa highland Christians around Dekemhare are of the Hazo origin. (5) The Ankala Afar Christians around Tserona are of Afar origin by extension. (6) The Mine-Fre highland Christians are of the Begemidr – Gondar origin. [Here: Mine-Fre in Afar means: YALLI BAHO; meaning - Let God Fulfill; and was coined as such, because their Gondari ancestor was unknown by any particular name]. (7) There are also highland Christians of Tigray origin, whose extension goes deep into Adwa, Tembien, Shire Enda Sellasie and Kilte Awlallo. Therefore, the Tigrinya speaking highlanders are disqualified from the definition of Biher / Nationality. The Tigre speakers being the origin of the Tigrinya speaking highlanders they instantly fall within the Tigrinya speaking category. The same applies to all other language groups within Eritrea proper except for those from the Rashaida origin. Even we the Afar groups are of different clan origin. For instance, the Ankalas are said to be home-grown Cushitic people within Eritrea proper; the others like Mahi are from Harar, and other Afar groups have lineage links with Issas, Rayas and Kereyu Cushitic groups in Tajura, Djibouti and deep inside Ethiopia. Similarly the Sahos are of different origin. So are the Tewke and Terke of Bilen who trace their origins into the Meroni (Tewke), and Adkeme Melega (Terke). The Bani/Bane are an alliance of various ethnic groups within Eritrea and its vicinity.

So, to our dismay, Issayas Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta brought about their Ethnic mechanism of Biher /Nationality/ in order to isolate the marginalized pastoralist societies from one another; deny us proper education; and eventually to tyrannize and Tigrinize us. This very subjugation compels us to resist against this very dominant Tigrinyazation idea. We can no longer afford to fan with the Tigrinya Christian chauvinists and entertain freely their impressions. Instead, we are readily determined to challenge them at any and every global arena where they have had thus far virtual monopolies within their jurisdictions. One thing they should remember is that, as Eritrea is still a nation in the making, they need to come to terms with us pastoralists either to make it or keep steadfastly marginalizing us in order to break it.

Hence on a more serious note, we are becoming obliged to ask as to why we the marginalized pastoral communities live under one roof with our highland chauvinist oppressors? Since the nominal attempt for marriage of convenience between the Christian Tigrinya chauvinists and the marginalized lowland pastoralists hasn't worked for centuries and decades immemorial, why do Issayas Afewarki, his PFDJ-ruling junta, and other highland chauvinist opposition groups in common expect the divide existing between them and we disappear on its own? How do highlanders ever expect to forge unity when they preach and work for disunity and look down upon us as 2nd class citizens?

Needless to say, Tyrant Afewarki and his PFDJ-ruling junta's oppressive actions against the marginalized pastoralist communities are cooking in a pressure cooker for a long while now. And yet, Afewarki and his ruling junta as well as his Tigrinya kin but grouping as political opposition against Tyrant Afewarki are pretending to tell the wide world that there is no highland vs. lowland problems within Eritrea proper. Nor do they want to come closer to the vivid pastoralists' societal problems and resolve them democratically. Simply highlanders want pastoralists to fit into their hypocritical arrangements for the sake of making Eritrea a relevant state for their own power domain; where they have taken for granted that they can twist our (Afar-Kunama and other pastoralists) arms in any direction they like; and we be bowing and bound to follow suit without questioning any of our human and birth rights pertinent to our livelihoods.

Hey, let them know that those hey days of dancing guerilla fighters dances in circle in the name of "Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front" are gone once and for all. For us pastoralists, there is no return back to highlanders' implicit and totalitarian domination. In fact, as freedom is a free asset to strive for, we are determined to zoom through the protracted and long march to attain freedom for our inalienable human rights and dignity at all costs; and bound to join hands with our brethren on the other side of the isles to enrich our communities freely as we deem it proper.

For Christian highland Tigrinya chauvinists, they are better off if they choose side – either to adjoin their Christian neighbors to whom they are related by extension deep inside Ethiopia; or continue to remain aloof on their own for other circumstantial reasons that I cannot dwell on at this moment.