

First and foremost let me make my position crystal clear why I decided to write this piece. I am not affiliated to any political organization nor am I interested to address any party, governing elite, or government in relation to this essay. I see myself as an independent scholar who advances a modicum of advocacy on behalf of Ethiopia, and I would be more than willing to perform as a spokesperson for my country.

As the subtitle of this essay implies, I am critiquing the recent video clip entitled *US Policy: Ethiopia A Failed State*¹ that has been circulating among Ethiopians in the Diaspora. I am perplexed and flabbergasted by the contents of the narrative of the video surrounding a pending disaster for Ethiopia, and while I am not interested in totally refuting what has been presented in the video, I am however disappointed by the egregious negligence and exclusion of the Ethiopian people, the ultimate force who play a pivotal role in determining the fate of Ethiopia. Moreover, the video completely ignores the greatness of Ethiopia that I will address later in order to reinforce my thesis of 'Ethiopia, too big a nation to fail'.

The doomsday video clip, written by E. Veracity and narrated by Thomas B. Miller, does not offer any new information regarding the reality on the ground in Ethiopia and it is, by and large, a rehash of apocalyptic scenario that we have come across over and over again. I would not mind if the producers of this video sincerely criticize or oppose the current government of Ethiopia, especially if their rationale is substantiated with verifiable evidence. This would have been a major contribution for those of us who want to learn, but what the writer and narrator of the video have provided us is a cliché of romanticized and overly simplistic political analysis of the Ethiopian reality. Adding insult to injury, the data in the video, including the many pictures, may have been inputs from Ethiopians, but the video is the making of non-Ethiopians who hardly understand the history and culture of Ethiopians. Ethiopian presenters are conspicuously absent in the video.

On top of the above defects, I have come to conclude that the writer and narrator, in fact, turned themselves [unwittingly perhaps] into irrational robots obsessed with "the Tigray Government" and "the disintegration of Ethiopia". These latter two phrases are the general patterns of political language that are repeated throughout the video to the point of existential absurdity.

For the uninitiated, uninformed, and people with low political acumen, the story narrated in the video may sound up-to-date and authentic. For people who have been following Ethiopian politics in some depth, however, the central thesis of the narration is abundantly clear that it is in fact gleaned from various press clippings that have been around for quite some time. For instance, five years ago, Dr. Gregory Stanton delivered a speech to a small Ethiopian audience with same content and tone that the Documentary has presented to Ethiopian viewers now. So that readers can have a balanced grasp of the Veracity, Miller, and Stanton trio analyses, I hereby present what I wrote in 2010 in response to Stanton:

Dr. Stanton attempted to substantiate his thesis of a "Tigrayan regime to colonize the best of Ethiopia" by his argument stated as "effectively a Tigrayan takeover of the whole country." Furthermore, in an omen anticipating sign, the speaker said, "who do you think is to pay for all this?" and he answers by saying, "the Tigrayans"; "I am worried for the Tigrayans," says Stanton, "who could become victims [of genocide]" themselves.

First and foremost, the speaker's claims are spectacularly implausible as to lack of credibility. Secondly, the Tigrayans are not colonizers and they are not presiding over "internal colonization". The latter concept is paradigmatically bankrupt and meaningless in any given historical context.

With respect to the Gambella massacre, Dr. Stanton has a point. A massacre took place on

December 13, 2003. I am of the opinion that the Gambella incident must be re-investigated and after a corpus delicti has been established, the perpetrators must be brought before justice. However, to charge all Tigrayans as responsible for the massacre in Gambella is not only hopelessly false, but it is also against reason and history.²

The same rhetoric has now been unleashed by the so-called documentary video (henceforth, 'Documentary') which, in the same vein of Stanton's depiction of the Ethiopian reality, charges the people of Tigray with crime against humanity. However, to be fair to the producers and presenters of the Documentary, they are less tempted to confuse the people of Tigray with the Government, although they too also fail to attribute the class composition of the ruling party of Ethiopia. Ultimately, thus, they were unable to make distinction between a seating government that happen to be predominantly Tigrayan and the people of Tigray, who incidentally may not even know what happened in Gambella and/or Ogaden, let alone be accomplice in the massacres.

It is unfortunate that the Anuaks had to sustain such kind of massacre, and as indicated above, I suggested that the Government brings the perpetrators before justice, but apart from the incarceration of 37 people suspected in being involved in the massacre and the Government's official apology to the Anuak in 2004, I have not heard of any criminal conviction of the people who instigated the massacre. The Government should have taken the necessary and appropriate action by way of prosecuting the criminals. It seems to me, the TPLF/EPRDF has a major defect in maintaining an eerie silence vis-à-vis major events that drastically affects the people. Examples are abound, but suffice to mention some: The pending crisis and looming war between Ethiopia and Eritrea was not fully explained to the Ethiopian people until the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF, now PFDJ) fully controlled Badme and moved on and occupied Zalambessa and virtually dismantled the entire town; the etiology of Meles Zenawi's illness and subsequent death; and the absence of follow up news from EBC on the \$25 million dollar worth helicopter that was hijacked and ended up on Eritrean soil. This kind of muzzled behavior definitely gives rise to conspiracy theories and doomsday prophecies by disgruntled cyber politicians.

In spite of the documentary's charges of "a single ethnic group" leading Ethiopia "toward disintegration", I maintain that the current regime in power is not entirely Tigrayan, and it is for the following reasons:

1. There is no doubt that the TPLF is the dominant party in the EPRDF, but unless we completely abandon class analysis and the sociological methodology of stratification in the critical examination of the nature and characteristics of the political system in Ethiopia, we can still observe the cohesiveness of a political group (or groups) united by a common interest and ideological conviction. This methodology is universally applicable for all hitherto societies and also for prevailing contemporary political systems. The EPRDF cannot be viewed outside this conceptual framework.

2. When I was at Addis Ababa University, my colleagues and I had perceived the Haile Selassie Government as an Amhara Government and by extension, the Amhara as the dominant nationality. While there is some truth in this perception, as I have argued in my previous writings, we were wrong in viewing the Emperor's regime as Amhara and also viewing the latter as the sole beneficiaries; we were, in fact, myopic that we were unable to see the abject poverty of the Amhara, who were indeed downtrodden peasants in northern Shewa, Wollo, Gonder, and Gojjam. Same logic applies to the present Government and the Tigrayan people. In fact, the top echelon of the EPRDF, including the various ministries and the huge bureaucracy are staffed by people from various ethnic groups, and it is this cohesive class that must be viewed as the privileged class in the power nexus, not the people of Tigray.

One other point of argument that is repeated over and over again by the opposition is that minority groups should not govern over majority groups. This "logic" rather flies in thin air as a false syllogism because it depends on a fulcrum of demographics that has been diminished to numbers only or to what I like to call 'census politics'. If we follow this haphazard argument, we can end up concluding, 'the Tigrayans are a minority and they should not govern Ethiopia,

and since the Oromo are the majority, they should run the country'. Lord, have mercy!

How about if a clique from the so-called majority seizes state power, vows to represent its majority constituency but gradually alienates itself from them and from other ethnic groups, and tramples over justice, trashes development programs, and stifles economic growth? Should we not look for equality, justice, freedom, and development, rather than mere numbers in the composition of the ruling elite? There is no doubt that equal representation in government is preferable, but subjective wishes and objective realities don't always correspond. The fact that we have political classes and political arrangements has to do with history's verdict, which is essentially independent of our will. And it is for this apparent reason that the Anglo-Saxons are still dominant in the United States, a much more democratic country in the world.

Unfortunately however, the census politics is clamored to the point of meaninglessness in the so-called Documentary, and the pitfalls of the latter has now permeated other non-Ethiopian groups like Dekebat Ertra, who also seem to lavish in in the idea of minority Tigrayan vs. majority Amhara/Oromo. Based on the Documentary, this Eritrean group has produced an opinionated editorial (in Tigrigna) entitled "What is the United States Policy toward Ethiopia at this Moment?"³ Both the Documentary and the Dekebat wrongly conjectured that the failed Ethiopian state or a state heading toward failure has to do with cynical US policy of supporting "the Tigrayan regime".

Quite the contrary, based on the data and information I have there is no US white paper to date that directly or indirectly contributes to the failure of Ethiopia. If at all, the US wants a strong Ethiopia because it is only through Ethiopia that American foreign policy in the Horn of Africa and in the rest of the Continent can smoothly be implemented. And it is not without reason that the US, time again, portrayed Ethiopia as its best ally in the war against terrorism, however elusive and confused the concept and definition of terrorism is. A stable Ethiopia is in the best interest of the United States, and the White House and the Department of State are cognizant of this hard fact.

Moreover, for those of us who teach African studies and closely follow African current events, the failed states in Africa are countries like Somalia, Guinea Bissau, Democratic Republic of the Congo; and as of recent, Libya and the Central African Republic have been added to the failed states lexicon. Compared to these countries, Ethiopia is by far stable, and far from being a failed state, the country has now attracted hundreds of investors from all over the world, and unless there is a hidden US agenda that I need to be enlightened with, to the best of my knowledge American, European, and Asian companies would not venture unto Ethiopia if the country is indeed heading toward instability and disintegration.

The last actors that joined the chorus of Ethiopian disunity and/or disintegration engendered by "the Tigray regime" are ESAT or Ethiopian Satellite TV⁴ and Isaias Afewerki. Two ESAT journalists have interviewed the Eritrean President and the entire Question and Answer session ended up with 'Ethiopia and Woyane', and incredibly nothing about Eritrea.

One of the questions posed by ESAT to Ato Isaias was in regards to his views on Ethiopia, and his answer was, "We can't talk about Ethiopia, but we can talk about Woyane." This is not surprising at all because, following the Ethiopian and Eritrean war in 1998-2000, the covenant between the EPLF and TPLF had been torn apart irreparably. While the damage of the relations between the two forces could be understood in the context of the war and its consequence, the Eritrean obsession and preoccupation with the TPLF (or Woyane as they want to address it) is difficult to fathom.

However we analyze and interpret the Ethiopian-Eritrean relations, I observe two paradoxes in this incredibly complex political conundrum: 1) The friend-turned-foe TPLF in the eyes of the EPLF, and 2) the unholy alliance of ESAT and the EPLF (PFDJ)

With respect to the first paradox, it is an established fact that the TPLF and EPLF were allies (or God-cousins), although intermittently their relationship was tainted by oddities, and at times even with irreconcilable differences. Both Ethiopian and Eritrean forces who struggled

against the Derg military government know too well that they supported each other and collaborated on many venues of the major battlefields, and some (not necessarily all) acknowledge that the TPLF fighters, in fact, contributed immensely to the liberation of Eritrea. Hundreds, if not thousands of them have died in Eritrea, but neither the TPLF nor the EPLF have spoken about this. Here comes another eerie silence (or rigidity) of the TPLF.

In regards to the second paradox, I observe the old cliché of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' when I witness ESAT gravitating toward Asmara and allying itself with Ato Isaias, not knowing perhaps that its own supporters still view Eritrea as a lost Ethiopian territory and also not cognizant that it is on the wrong side of history. It is not the alliance per se that I am criticizing, for organizations from time to time can forge alliances, divorce, and go separate ways, a phenomenon that very much characterized the Horn of Africa politics. In fact, I know it first hand when the EPLF was an incipient liberation front and also during its heyday of its struggle seeking alliances with various Ethiopian organizations, not to mention its support to these organizations. I personally have supported its political program and even translated (abridged form) its first manifesto (Our Objectives and Us or *Nehnan Elamanan*) from Tigrigna into Amharic when I was at Haile Selassie University. After Badme and its aftermath, however, things have changed dramatically and history was turned upside down, and so were my views.

It is when history is turned upside down that ESAT sought alliance with the EPLF, and the Ethiopian people would counterintuitively reject ESAT without even bothering to figure out its rationale for the alliance. Moreover, although ESAT has followers and listeners, its operations from Eritrea would repel Ethiopians because they would associate Asmara with the war that destroyed thousands of people and villages and the latter nightmare is still fresh in their minds. ESAT's paradox in its newly found romance, however, is going to be an unforeseen bonus to the EPRDF, and that by itself is a paradox within a paradox.

Despite the wrong political move made by the Ethiopian Satellite TV groupings, however, I like to extend one credit to the ESAT journalists for forwarding one interesting question to President Isaias. That question was, "If you think that Woyane was to divide up Ethiopia and create discord among the Ethiopian people, why did you then support them?" Ato Isaias, of course, did not fully answer the question, and because he is good at manipulation he made references to the old alliances as strategic agenda of the EPLF, which incidentally happen to be true.

Had the ESAT journalists gone further and reinforced the above question by saying, "How about the Addis Ababa Charter that was called upon by the TPLF/EPRDF, in which you were present, and even endorsed the spirit of the conference and the agenda of the TPLF?" That would have been a difficult question to answer.

Let me now substantiate my thesis of 'Ethiopia is too big to fail'. Twenty three years ago, a lot of Ethiopians were concerned about the possible disunity of the Ethiopian people (I prefer the word 'people' instead of 'peoples') after the Regional States were formed based on language and ethnicity. I too was worried because I thought the harmony of Ethiopians established since antiquity would be destroyed and create havoc to the social fabric of Ethiopians. I had that concern despite my support of the self-determination of nationalities, but I am now at ease because the disunity, let alone disintegration, of Ethiopia did not occur. However, I still uphold that Article 39 of the Ethiopian Constitution, which guarantees secession to the various nationalities, must be amended or altogether removed from the Constitution.

What the Documentary video script writer and narrator, Stanton, and some Ethiopian opposition groupings failed to underscore is the role of the Ethiopian people in the making of Ethiopian history and the unique state formation that was preserved for thousands of years. They failed to incorporate into their theses the long history of state formation accompanied by formidable kingdoms.

All civilizations of antiquity, including that of Egypt (Kemet) and Nubia and the classical civilizations of Kush (an offshoot of Nubia) and Ethiopia (all Nile valley civilizations) sprung

from a solid foundation of sedentary agriculture, and the first farmers in all these civilizations actually created stable centralized systems and metropolises in which urban material culture thrived. They also governed their respective societies by constitutions and juris prudence and successfully resolved major conflicts, and it is for this reason that the ancient Egyptians and Ethiopians have effectively repulsed several occupation forces. In the strict sense, these kinds of societies are not susceptible to sudden destructions. On the other hand, societies that haven't had the fortunes of centralized state systems like Somalia and South Sudan are vulnerable because kinship, as opposed to strong states, rule over their respective societies, and it is not surprising that we have witnessed conflicts between the Nuer and the Dinka in South Sudan. In Somalia, the conflict was much worse because the country sunk to the level of internecine skirmishes of sub-clans such as the Hawye. This again is not surprising because the Somalis and the Southern Sudanese didn't have centralized state systems until the European colonizers came and ruled them under a new but superficial nation-state that was installed, and when they went back they left behind fragile state systems.

That is why countries like Ethiopia with legacy of strong states don't easily crumble or succumb to disintegration. Even the worst political upheaval like the Era of Princes or *Zemene Mesafint* (1769-1855) did not completely dismember Ethiopia. During this time, Ethiopia (proper Abyssina) was divided into several spheres of influences of the Princes, but the latter respected and retained the ex officio role of the king, who was viewed in the eyes of Ethiopians as the symbol of unity. It is for this reason that the sovereign lords let the king enjoy a secondary role in governorship and this way they secured the continuation of the Ethiopian state.

The above historical fact is completely ignored by the critics, the opposition forces, and the Documentary producers and editors. Their analyses also lack methodological rigor and political economy evaluation of Ethiopia, and as a result they come up with fantastic ideas, mystified diagnoses, and wrong prescriptions.

If the script writer and narrator of the Documentary and the opposition groupings distract themselves for a moment from "the Tigray Government" fixation and attempt to grasp the wide-ranging attributes of the Ethiopian society, they would be able to have a second glance to their claims and conjectures and see that Ethiopia is indeed too big to fail. However, their thesis of "Ethiopia must democratize" is acceptable to me, and although I have dedicated many chapters to this issue in my most recent book, I will nonetheless address it in a separate forthcoming article for the consumption of readers.

Finally, I am not going to say "never", but given the long history of Ethiopia and some of the reinforcing paradigms mentioned above, Ethiopia is too big a nation to fail and it will prevail despite political turbulence that may threaten its very existence.

Notes:

1. <http://acadforum.com/ethiopianvideo/2015/02/03/U-S-policy-Ethiopia-a-failed-state-documnetary>
2. Ghelawdewos Araia, "The Fate of Ethiopia Must be Decided by Ethiopians: A Commentary on Gregory Stanton's Speech," November 15, 2010 www.africanidea.org/commentary_IDEA.html
3. <http://www.tesfanews.net/u-s-policy-ethiopia-a-failing-state> the Tigrigna viewpoint was posted on February 8
4. <http://www.ashamaddis.com/v/esat-interview-isaias-afwerki-president-of-eritrea-feb-2015>

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