

TRAITOR ISIAS AS PAWN OF ETHIOPIAN EXPANSIONIST ASPIRATIONS AND GULF HEGEMONY: AN EFFECTIVE CATALYST FOR THE WEAKENING OF HERD MENTALITY

Abdu Habib

sabbahar@rocketmail.com

“Men Think in Herds and Go Mad in Herds, While They Only Recover Their Senses Slowly, and One by One.” (Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1841, London)

The term “herd mentality” is among the widely-used political vocabulary nowadays. It is for that reason that it is used in the formulation of the title of this piece. Nonetheless, as the term could mean different things for different people, it is essential to define the concept as used in this piece, showing what it stands for and why it is significant as a category. This will hopefully protect this piece from vagueness, ambiguity, and the causing of unwanted confusion. By the same token, it is appropriate to explain as to why I have chosen the noun “pawn” rather than “player” in the formulation of the title, to describe the role of the half-civilized barbarian chief. It should be made clear here, if somebody is described as a “pawn”, it politically means that he/she is possessed and used by others (controllers) for their own advantage. True, a pawn is a player too, but a special player because of the connotation given here in relation to the controllers. The controllers we are referring to here are Dr. Abiy Ahmed’s Ethiopia, which has started witnessing the revival of its old expansionist aspirations these days, and the Gulf proponent hegemonic trend in the region, represented by Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The concept of “herd mentality” refers to decision-making on basis of the actions of others, ignoring one’s own feelings and without considering the question why,

or without using critical thinking. It is sometimes called herd instinct. To illustrate, imagine a sheep that blindly follows the flock, no matter where the flock is heading to. Politically, nowhere was this more evident in Africa, if not in the whole globe, except in North Korea, than in post-independent Eritrea, where the horrific consequences of blind obedience have been extraordinarily demonstrated in real life and in dangerous proportions. Accordingly, one would ask: ***What forced these folks to behave like a herd just following what they were told to do?***

It is not a mystery that these groups might think that success does not depend on their own judgment and exertion but on the indolent reliance upon what the master or his loyalist aides directed. In other words, these folks have reduced themselves to copycats who cannot think or act on their own but follow in full conformity and uniformity what they had been instructed to do, to the finest details. Other terms that could express conformity and uniformity include herd instinct, as indicated above, cult worship and bandwagon. This will lead us to the question: ***Is herd mentality or herd instinct helpful or harmful for the society?***

Social psychology teaches that belief often gets precedence over reason and conformity over personal judgment. This theory of herd instinct makes sense because our ancestors would have not been able to fight wild animals, survive the harshness of nature, and harvest crops without banding together. However, as humans, our herd instinct slowly developed into individual judgment and critical thinking over centuries, responding to the needs and demands of modern life, advancement, and complications of human society. This does not mean that herd instinct has been reduced to zero. On the contrary, even today, we need cooperation and strong group instinct, but coupled with individual judgment and critical thinking, using each one of them where and when necessary.

As a matter of fact, group instinct played a positive role in enhancing our struggle for national independence and self-determination, and the unusual absence of critical thinking had been tolerated for the common good or to face the common enemy. Nonetheless, after independence, we needed critical thinking more than

ever before and herd instinct in the form of conformity and uniformity was supposed to be largely undermined and brought under control, if not totally eradicated, so that we could use our brains in achieving the complex tasks of reconstructing the country and building a democratic state in which every Eritrean lives as an equal citizen, having equal rights, opportunities, and obligations. Unfortunately, what has happened was just the opposite: the herd instinct, which had been manipulated, was promoted to the level of full-scale herd mentality by the self-imposed leader of the Shifta gang and his demagogues, while critical thinking became totally banned and criminalized.

In a nutshell, the manipulated or the promoted herd instinct to an absolute herd mentality has given the monster a free hand to commit all types of injustices against citizens, ruling with the gun and with the help of the PFDJ as his instrument of coercion, under the conditions of the total absence of the rule of law, constitution, public participation and accountability to the people, through a social contract based on taxation and representation. With regard to the socio-economic aspect, the gang has turned into a looting machine over a country that holds natural resources worth trillions of dollars, while the population is blighted with extreme poverty and forced to leave the country by the hostile and harsh policies, perfectly tailored to uproot the country from its elites and youth. All these have been tolerated by the people, and we had seen only a few major explicit reactions in the form of resistance from inside the regime and its supporters. Recently, we see a turning point as the regime goes to a great length in its hostile and anti-nationalist path, committing serious multiple national treasons that make the Atse the pawn of Ethiopian expansionist aspirations and Gulf hegemonic adventure on the Red Sea.

Though treason and Atse Isias have been synonymous in the pre-independence and post-independence Eritrean history, the level of the current series of treason we see dangerously unfolding constitutes a disturbing turning point in the adventurous path of the gang leader. These traitorous actions and behaviours remind us of some of our high school physics classes about Newton's third law of motion, which states, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction".

Most importantly, when we relate things to Newton's third law of motion, we need to notice that the forces "action" and "opposite reaction" come as pairs, while the opposite reaction is qualified by the adjective "equal". This will take us to the question: ***Does Newton's third law of motion have application to politics and to our current struggle for freedom, justice, and democracy?***

Though Newton's third law of motion was originally formulated to apply to the movement of objects, it could apply to politics too. Here we are talking about ideas, egos, and policies of the different political forces, in place of objects. Imagine the government (let us call it force I) with its instruments of coercion, policies, and the way it handles the rights of the people or takes action. To complete the picture between the two contending forces, friction is an opposite force (force II) or the opposite reaction resisting the government policies and the way it handles the people and their rights. To put it in concrete terms, what Atse Isias is doing by way of serving the interests of Ethiopia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and compromising the national interests and sovereignty of Eritrea, represent the action, while the resistance he is facing is the opposite reaction. At present, the reaction against the oppressor, in this case the ruling gang is definitely opposite, but it may not be equal to that of the action (the oppression, all types of injustice, and human rights violation). That is why we want to raise the level of our struggle, which is the reaction, to qualify for being equal to the action of the oppressor, the ruling gang.

With regards to the crimes the Atse is committing against the sovereignty of the country and its national interests, compromising everything in favour of his Ethiopian and Gulf sponsors, a lot has been written and said during the last few months that almost every Eritrean is well-informed to the extent of having expertise. With this in mind, we do not need to recycle and waste time on things everybody knows at the tip of his/her fingers. Instead, this piece will focus on how these acts of treason have started undermining the blind loyalty of the supporters of the regime and consolidating critical thinking, weakening the herd mentality we had raised above. Here comes the question: ***Are we really changing from a***

society held together by pure gregarious instincts into one by stronger forces that use reasoning and critical thinking?

The question raised above is about the dramatic departure from the default position and reversal of the course the enemy of himself (Atse Isias) is helping us to make a reality, through his dangerous actions of national treason against our national sovereignty; actions that are forcing some of his supporters and colleagues to flip on him. That is why we see him as the catalyst in undermining herd mentality, as coined in the title of this piece.

As a matter of fact, the struggle between opposites always existed in Eritrea's politics, before and after independence. With regard to the pre-independence period, nobody would deny the struggle, whereas one should also to be blind to believe otherwise, regarding the post-independence period. Within the same context, one cannot lose sight of the significance of the voices we are recently hearing from inside the regime and its supporters, who are speaking out without fear and favour, putting their thumb on the scale in favour of the democratic change that has become as essential as oxygen in Eritrea. To make things easier, one would be tempted to raise the question: ***What does dramatic departure from the default position and the reversal of the course by the supporters of the regime, hinted at above, mean?***

The default position of many supporters of the regime has looked into everything the Atse has said or has done as correct and genuine. This is dramatically changing. The reason for this rapid change is the recent relations of the Atse with the Ethiopian Government, disguised as the making of peace. Of course, good relations with the Government of Ethiopia, by itself, is not a problem. The problem is the intersection between these relations and the compromising position of the Atse to the national sovereignty and the national interests of the country, a situation which Eritreans see as a red line crossed. One would argue: ***What is strange for the Atse who has never sworn to uphold national sovereignty and national interest to be seen undermining them? What is the red line he had never crossed during the last 27 years?***

The first question, above, reflects a perfect reality, but the second question is true in kind but an exaggeration in degree. Countless concessions at the expense of the national interest have taken place during the 27 years of the post-independence period. In fact, some of them cannot be seen short of a national treason. However, nothing went as far as directly compromising national sovereignty, an act to be considered the highest form of national treason. Simply put, it means, the time now is different, and that no Eritrean, irrespective of political affiliation and social distinction, should sit back and wait “until the axe falls over the head”, as the Arabs say. This situation forced some former government officials, party leaders or members, and supporters of the regime to be willing to stand up to the treasonous actions of the gang leader (Members of the Eritrean Defence Forces will hopefully do the same). Everybody we speak to these days is feeling a sense of whiplash from the pattern of behaviour and actions the Atse is showing by way of being a pawn of the Ethiopian aspirations and the Gulf hegemony. To go beyond generalities, we ask: ***Why are these condemnations and defections from inside the regime and its camp important? How should we treat them?***

The split between the pro-regime and anti-regime Eritreans has been frightening for decades. Now we see a breakthrough and clashing narratives about the regime have started diminishing, with one shared truth standing out: ***Atse Isias is treasonous.*** Now we hear some former pro-regime supporters and regime officials saying: Why should I repeat that the sky is green because all around me have said that?

It took one person, Ato Berhane Abrehe, the former Minister of Finance, to disagree with the dominant group around him to free others from the social pressure they have been feeling. He opened the gate for disobedience and defiance wider to the extent that we daily hear statements of defection and condemnations in the social media, following his steps. This is the liberating power of defiance and we practically see the truthfulness of the saying, “Bravery is contagious”.

It would have been easier for Ato Berhane to ignore the fact that the social pressure exists; and here we are referring to the Atse, his gang, and anti-nationalist agenda. That would have been a mistake. Instead, he recognized that the social pressure and the anti-nationalist agenda exist, and he developed a strategy to fight them by writing his book and giving statements to challenge the group in power. In few words, he took a stand by defining who he was and what he wants, without apology. No doubt he put himself in the middle of adversity and negative situation. This means that he was comfortable with conflict and at the same time comfortable with being uncomfortable. It is because of this that we see emotions running high in the social media and among our communities throughout the globe. Yes, in general we can say this is a cause for hope and celebration, but the question remains: ***How do we see this positive development in more detail?***

We see this as a golden moment to unite Eritreans. No doubt this is a very disturbing pattern for the ruling gang and that is why they had to arrest Ato Berhane. Whatever they do, Ato Berhane is the symbol of freedom, who will remain the biggest thorn in the Atse's side, until the regime faces its final fate. He broke the ice of fear and launched an on-going campaign which has opened our eyes that freedom is worth of any sacrifice, teaching us that our interests, as Eritreans, do not overlap but are exactly one and the same. After all, national sovereignty is not a partisan issue. It was what all had fought for: Christian, Muslim, highlander, lowlander, conservative and liberal, irrespective of ethnicity, race, age or gender. From our part, we need to realize that the more we welcome and celebrate this development (defections and defiance from inside), the more this trend will collect momentum and expand until it totally isolates the treasonous leader and his mafia group, contributing to the downfall of the regime and enabling us to wake up from this nightmare soon. As the situation is not that much smooth but rough and bumpy, we need to ask: ***Who are the Eritrean enemies of this new development other than the regime?***

As any other positive development, this change of the alignment of forces, as detailed above has its own enemies, who by commission and commission play a

negative role, unconsciously complementing the role of the regime. At the forefront are the following two groups:

- Those whom Christopher Barzak, author of the novel, *One for Sorrow*, describes saying, “Just to avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, and be nothing.” This group is always looked at with contempt and despise.
- More dangerous are the nay Sayers. They are so blind that this development will eventually have serious consequences in ending the nightmare. I do not understand in what way this new development raises a red flag in their minds, if they really stand for freedom, justice, and democracy. They try to lecture us or make us doubt that nothing good comes from former “enablers” of the dictator, trying to bend the truth to fit their bias. One is tempted to ask them the following questions:
 - Does it at all matter when one awakens? Have they ever heard about the wisdom: “Late is better than never.”?
 - Was it their wish that none of the former supporters or officials of the regime liberate themselves from the herd mentality and change their stand, starting to think critically and stand by the side of the Eritrean people?
 - Aren’t the nay Sayers themselves the real enablers of the regime when they do not encourage defections and the change of the existing negative trend in favour of the struggle of the people? Isn’t the distinction between them and the enablers of the regime a distinction without difference?
 - Can they tell us how they are going to bring change without having defections and change of heart from inside the regime?
 - Have they ever read about the fall of communism and the important role of the former enablers of the communist regimes in bringing about change?

- Can't they realize that nobody will stop the march of history and that they are jumping in as spoilers of the situation when the regime is in trouble?
- Can they do the Eritrean people a favour by shutting up their mouths and leave those who are determined to do miracles play their noble role?

Of course, any Eritrean who monitors what the Atse is doing with the Ethiopians and the Gulf reaction would be frustrated. Our people deserve more than the derision, scorn and humiliation to which they have been subjected during the past 27 years. That is why what we hear our people express about the Atse and his cronies is always nothing less than openly expressed contempt. At the same time, we should not make a mistake of forgetting that there are still government officials in Eritrea who are good citizens of professional and educational accomplishments, with Eritrea's interest at heart, in addition to clean reputation and social status. ***Are we fair enough to see from afar all government officials as enablers?*** It is, in fact, becoming clear that even the cabinet ministers are not aware of what is going on. We hear many of them are asking: ***If the Atse does not see his role as a concession, why does he hide what is going on from the people and his colleagues?*** This is to say that we should know who to blame. This will lead us to the final question: ***What should be our role as justice seekers in light of the current positive developments?***

A lot is going on, inside and outside the country, enabling us to stand united against the damaging agenda of Atse Isias and his close cronies. Many have already started thinking on their own and rejecting the groupthink. We congratulate them for becoming themselves, but we encourage them to join ranks with the justice seekers, whom we call on to be the cooler heads and bridge-builders. That keeps hope alive. But we have to realize that the worst threat is not the Atse: it is rather ***indifference***. If we want to exercise our rights, we should not stay out of the spotlight and want others to do it for us. We have to show up and take responsibility. The saying goes, "There is place and time for

everything". This is the right time and the right forum, demanding us to play our role for the most pressing issue: the survival of the sovereignty of our country.

Before winding up this piece, we express our dismay towards Dr. Abiy Ahmed, who has turned a deaf ear to the voices of the Eritrean people, whose sons and daughters have made too many written and verbal calls so that he stops ignoring the sufferings of the Eritrean people, who should be his real partners, and at the same time siding with the butcher against the people. We should make it clear to the Ethiopian Prime Minister here that our people can easily go beyond the appearance of the rhetoric of peace to understand what really is going on behind the scene, and that he may end up in history as a collaborator of the butcher and a brutal oppressor of his people, reminding him of his double face: the human face towards his people and the inhuman one towards the Eritrean people, whose blood is thinner to Dr. Abiy than that of the Ethiopians. ***What is racism if this is not a racist outlook?*** =====