**Thoughts on the Amhara Existential Struggle Against TPLF and OLF/PP Tribal Extremists: Can Ethiopia Survive the Scourge of the two Extreme Centrifugal*s*?**

*In honour of the teachers and journalists Meskerem Abera and Tadios Tantu, who are now being held in state custody for speaking up for the voiceless.*

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**Background**

TPLF was founded on the basis of the Amhara as its primary enemy. Since it came to power in 1991, it ruled by institutionalizing ethnic-apartheid system—underpinned by anti-Amhara ideology. However, the continuous and relentless displacement and gruesome wanton massacre of this specific group has intensified under PM Abiy Ahmed’s leadership, many folds over. The PM actively avoids mentioning the massacres and ethnic cleansing, and instead he engages in all sorts of language contortions and false ***bothsidesism***: when hundreds of innocent civilians are stabbed and clubbed to death because of their ‘Neftegna’ label (a pejorative term used to denigrate Amhara citizens), these are referred only in passing as merely inter-communal conflicts. Thousands of so-Amhara women, children and others in between have been slaughtered with impunity in Oromia Regional State. Abiy Ahmed’s government made it open season to massacre Amharas in his ethnic apartheid home region.

In an illuminating article, Dr. **Tesfaye Demmellash (March 14 2022)** raised a vital question, Should the Amhara people resist in all ways necessary the tyrannical rule of the party of “Oromia” led by the shifty, Janus-faced Abiy regime? Should Amharas protect themselves today from predatory, often genocidal, attacks by TPLF and OLF entities within, outside, or on the margins of Abiy’s ethnic regime? And, beyond fending off savage tribal aggression, in what way could the Amhara community mount a robust, transformative national resistance against the entire system of state ethnicism propped up in Ethiopia with the help of hostile foreign powers?[[1]](#endnote-1)

The Amhara as a distinct ethnic group was not solidified in the past and they are still not unified by the rather “shaky” politics of identity.[[2]](#endnote-2) The persecution and constant atrocity crimes committed against the Amharas have recently made them aware of the need for organizing to protect themselves. As Moges (2020) aptly captured:

“Amhara identity,in its current form, is arecent introduction and forced self-appropriation, caused by an existential threat and alienation. The younger generation has adopted its ‘Amharaness’; but most ordinary people are yet to fully embrace it, not least because of the lack of any effectively articulated ideological foundation or priorities and the absence of any ‘tailor-made’ solutions to the challenges facing them”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Generally, Amharas are deeply intertwined with other ethnic groups and geographically dispersed though out Ethiopia—which made them easy targets. The animosity that we see against Amharas is orchestrated by organized groups, in particular Tigrean and Oromo extremists. The lack of strong political organizations among the Amhara is partly because the Amharas are “invested” in national politics, pan-Ethiopian ideology and *citizen-based politics*. Ethiopianism and Amhara are inextricably intertwined, which is one reason for their endless persecution! Anti-Ethiopia elements have aversion to the Amharas’ zealousness and patriotism about Ethiopia.

The targeted eviction and episodes of the genocide of ethnic Amharas in the regional states of Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia are extremely worrying. At the time of composing this text, hundreds of thousands of residents in the Oromia region, most of them Amharas, have been displaced and thousands have been massacred in horrible and appalling manners. The pictures I saw recently were beastly cruel, dreadful, and ghastly.

The Amhara are proud people--proud of their *ethnicity* and *Ethiopianess*, simultaneously, their religion, and their special place in the world.  Their culture is strong, developed over many centuries, and it has withstood the incursions of outside governments and religions[[4]](#endnote-4).  Despite their hard life, the Amhara is a friendly and hospitable people[[5]](#endnote-5).

Unfortunately, there are no political leaders or strong organizations that protect the human rights of this ethnic group. As for those officials of ANDM that were part of EPRDF and the ADP (Amhara prosperity) integrated with the Prosperity Party, they first were recruits of the TPLF and the later are just the same people, but now serving the OPDO’s, Oromo prosperity’s interest, rather than standing up for the Amharas. The Amharas civil, political, economic, cultural, and social rights are violated through various means. Though all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the legally binding International Covenants of Human Rights are considered essential, there are certain types of violations we tend to consider more serious. Civil rights, which include the right to life, safety, and equality before the law are considered by many to be “first-generation” rights. Political rights, which include the right to a fair trial and the right to vote, also fall under this category. The Amharas living in the regional states of Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia are denied all of these. The Oromo and the Tigrean Nationalists (the two tribal monsters) have actively adopted the Dangerous Politics of Playing the Victim at the expense of the Amhara lives. In this victimhood play, the Amhara are triply victimized. 1) The Amhara are the ones who are the primary victims, targets of atrocity crimes (first-tier victimhood); 2) The ethno-nationalists claim that they, rather than the Amhara, are the victims (ጩኸቴን ቀሙኝ) (second-tier victimhood); and 3) the international community is misin­formed and manipulated by the ethno-nationalists, the majority of whom are so-called the ‘educated dia­spora’. The recent reports by the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and the press release by the State Department are testimonies that how much malice, distortions, and victim playing are at work both at international and national levels. The Amhara have increasingly become deliberately “The forgotten people” whose blood is thin? The global media and public opinion are indifferent to the humanitarian crisis and genocide facing the Amhara population persecuted by the ethno-nationalist armed groups, including some different sections and units of the security apparatus within regions where the Amhara reside.

I have written a lot on the subject. I still want to repeat the fact that genocide is an irrational venture and rational people do not know how to deal with it. It can only be stopped by *irrational groups*. Abandon your optimism in the goodness of human nature and do something about it. There is not a single case of genocide without government action or inaction. The West could have saved a good number of Jews before the defeat of the Nazis in 1945 but nothing was done. Genocide, mass murder, massacres. The words themselves are chilling, evoking images of the slaughter of countless innocents. What dark impulses lurk in our minds that even today can justify the eradication of thousands and even millions of unarmed human beings caught in the crossfire of political, cultural, or ethnic hostilities? This question lies at the heart of *Why Not Kill Them All?* Cowritten by historical sociologist Daniel Chirot and psychologist Clark McCauley, the book goes beyond exploring the motives that have provided the psychological underpinnings for genocidal killings. It offers a historical and comparative context that adds up to a causal taxonomy of genocidal events. *Why Not Kill Them All?* makes clear that there are no simple solutions, but that progress is most likely to be made through a combination of international pressures, new institutions and laws, and education. If genocide is to become a grisly relic of the past, we must fully comprehend the complex history of violent conflict and the struggle between hatred and tolerance that is waged in the human heart[[6]](#endnote-6). I read the book, but it did not help e grasp adequately the possible reasons or mechanism behind that level of cruelty against civilians, opening the abdomen of a pregnant woman, killing an ‘embryo, a fetus, and a baby’, and toddlers in front of their parents, burning alive a whole family, ‘practicing cannibalism’ etc.

**Amhara leadership and the way forward**

Amhara leadership must act wisely. Cautiously and when it comes to it, decisively. I have some ideas as to how this can be achieved. By the way, I can actually imagine a political landscape in which TPLF and Abiy work together, as allies. The duplicitous nature of Abiy Ahmed was further revealed by former U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Ambassador Jeffery Feltman.[[7]](#endnote-7) The Ambassador, in his latest article—*Ethiopia’s Hard Road to Peace. The Country’s Problems Go Far Beyond Tigray*— ‘exposed’ that he [Abiy] may use military force against Eritrea. If it’s not for Eritrea and Amhara forces, that played a pivotal role in resisting TPLF invasion after it took control of the Northern Command military garrisons, Abiy would have met Muammar Gaddafi’s fate. Given the last few days choreography and festivities in Mekelle, it appears the alliance of TPLF and PP-OPDO (against Amhara and Eritrea) is in full swing.

This seems impossible when we consider the last 2 years but the need and greed for power can be an excellent incentive. Until Amhara puts its fist on the table, they will be the scapegoat of TPLF and Central Government… and when Amhara puts its fist on the table I guarantee you that TPLF, OLA, Prosperity Party, etc. etc. and every other opportunistic powerbroker in Ethiopia will suddenly discover they need each other more than they hate each other.

My thoughts are that both “sides” in Ethiopia’s power struggle are determined to use ethnic favoritism and ethnic persecution to further their aims. Pretty much the only point of agreement between TPLF+proxies and Central Government +proxies is mistrust and hatred towards Amhara.  Mistrust because let’s face it, without Fano and Amhara leadership, as well as the sacrifices of its youth in the Fano movement, the TPLF would be comfortably living in Addis again.

Amhara has become a convenient scapegoat— Neither TPLF nor Central Government want to fight each other again (for the moment) but the violence that underpins their power has to be kept alight, like embers of the fire. Any act against each other risks a new round of conflict that neither TPLF nor Central Government has an appetite for at the moment, so the Amhara have become the perfect scapegoat that can be persecuted without fear of antagonizing each other.

I think it’s time for Amhara political elites to:

* Set aside all differences publicly and focus literally on a Defense Front— no other issue, ideology, etc. can overshadow the need for immediate and ACTIVE self-defense.
* Cease all reactive policies (=“reacting to” events, instead of “acting to” produce events) and take an initiative that puts serious pressure on Central Government, OLA, and the rest.
* Take the policies of Amhara Defense beyond the borders of Amhara Regional State.
* Act on hybrid models of defense towards OLA and sympathizers, as well as Central and Regional government officers and bureaucrats who have failed in ensuring the safety of Amhara citizens, wherever they may be within Ethiopia.
* Identify all people in positions of power who contribute to the persecution of Amhara —whether formal or informal power, making it clear that the years of impunity are over.
* Articulate multiple narratives that support each other and lay the groundwork for future national dialogue. Remember that the struggle of Amhara is in many ways the struggle of countless other peoples of Ethiopia—those who suddenly find themselves “labeled” and “accused”, including parts of Oromia, Southern State, etc. Ethnic divisionism and chauvinism serve only those who wish to rule by conflict and animosity, aware that their own failures in leadership can be dumped at the door of another ethnic group. TPLF, of course, spent 20 years blaming Welkait “conflict” to distract from their TPLF’s abysmal failure towards Tigrayan peasants, for example.
* Strike hard and strike fast. Make it too costly for OLA, TPLF, and Central Government to continue their anti-Amhara policies.

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**References**

1. [Ethiopia : The Amhara Existential Struggle Against Tribal Tyranny ... (borkena.com)](https://borkena.com/2022/03/14/amhara-existential-struggle-against-tribal-tyranny-thoughts-for-strategy-and-action/) https://borkena.com/2022/03/14/amhara-existential-struggle-against-tribal-tyranny-thoughts-for-strategy-and-action/ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This was not because Amhara people suffered from social, political, and economic subjugation less than others but Amhara identity as we know it today was only constructed in response to a target of repression, with the rise of Derg. https://www.theafricareport.com/43182/ethiopia-defining-amhara-nationalism-for-a-better-country/ [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.theafricareport.com/43182/ethiopia-defining-amhara-nationalism-for-a-better-country/> (Ethiopia: Defining Amhara nationalism for a better country. By Zola Moges. Posted on Sunday, 27 September 2020 12:19, updated on Wednesday, 4 November 2020 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ullendorf, Edward. *The Ethiopians.* London: Oxford University Press, 1960.

5 Buxton, David. *The Abyssinians.* New York: Praeger, 1970. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. 6 Chirot, D., & McCauley, C. (2010). Why not kill them all?. In *Why Not Kill Them All?*. Princeton University Press.

7Ethiopia’s Hard Road to Peace. The Country’s Problems Go Far Beyond Tigray. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ethiopia/ethiopias-hard-road-peace [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)