

## **6. The Growth of Ethnic Nationalism in the Post-1991 Ethiopia: Causes of Amhara Nationalism**

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### ***Abstract***

*Nationalism is the most flexible and resilient phenomenon with both constructive and devastative consequences. Unlike civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism is likely to degenerate into instability, civil war and disintegration as experienced in various countries. However, Ethiopia has officially recognized ethnic nationalism as a remedy to ethnic issues and national unity simultaneously under the banner of ethnic federalism. In spite of the novel rationale of addressing ethnic issues and promoting unity, national unity is deemphasized and ethnic issues are becoming hot spot in the socio-economic and political circles of the state. Cognizant of such a fact, this article delves into the causes of Amhara nationalism. Hence, to achieve the intended objective, the study employed concurrent design of mixed research approach relying on range of primary and secondary sources of data. To select interviewees and survey respondents, purposive and simple random sampling strategies were employed respectively. The data obtained from secondary and primary sources have been analyzed through simple descriptive and thematic analysis.*

*Accordingly, the finding of the study revealed that Amhara phobia narration, marginalization, endless eviction, seizing of territory and potential survival threat are triggering cause of Amhara nationalism. Thus, the main conclusion drawn from the finding is that ethnocratic political functioning and negative stereotype towards Amhara based on distorted story pave venue for Amhara to mobilize under ethnic nationalism as a tactical tool to curb the threat posed against them.*

**Key Words:** *Nationalism, ethnic-nationalism, ethnic-federalism, Amhara nationalism, anti-Amhara narration*

## **Introduction**

Nationalism is the most resilient and dynamic phenomenon that might be the breaker and maker of state, source of stability as well as factor of instability (Tamir, 1993). Hence, it may promote unity, self-rule and belongingness or it may become a source of rift and disintegration as experienced in Serbia, Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. Even, in today's globalized world, the spillover effect of ethnic consciousness is becoming the political hotbed of many countries. The issue of Basques and Catalan in Spain, Quebec in Canada, Welsh and Scottish in United Kingdom (Kellas, 1998; Mason, 2002) are some indications of the gravity of ethnic nationalism.

In Ethiopia, the Oromo and Tigray nationalism had ideated independent state since 1960s. Consequently, following the constitutional recognition of ethnic federalization, ethnic nationalism has become idiom of the day. Yet, there is theoretical contention on what the causes nationalism are. In the West, modernization and industrial revolution contributed to nationalism (Smith, 2009), whereas the need to preserve traditional values, culture and identity from imperialism (Kiwanuka, 1970) were the deriving factors of African nationalism. Still, the causes of nationalism are too contextual influenced by socio-economic, political and cultural settings. Ethnic nationalism is norm to the post-1991 Ethiopian political arena. Yet, Amhara nationalism is becoming hot agenda since recently in the social and broadcast media. It is attracting the attention of the government, which becomes factor of socio-economic mobilization, political organization and point of discussion in many occasions. The root of Amhara nationalism is still hotly debated whether it is the replica of Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front's ethnic politics, and its spillover

effect or other interlocked factors. This article, therefore, critically examines the deriving causes of Amhara nationalism.

### **Theoretical framework**

There are different theories on the concept of nation and nationalism. Some theories focus on when nation and nationalism came into existence, some others emphasize on the nature of nation and nationalism. However, in this article, the following issues are considered while the theoretical framework is adopted. One, ethnic group may imply nation and vice-versa (Connor, Smith, 1991; Yun, 1990). Two, the issue under the study is ethnic nationalism, which makes the use of theories owe to ethnicity valid. Third, the main rationale of the study is not to investigate the historical origin and setting of nationalism but to investigate the already existing nationalism and its socio-economic and political intricacies. Furthermore, the study attempts not to address nationalism under the context of nation-state, rather ethno-nationalism within centuries old multi-nation country, Ethiopia. Thus, this article uses primordialism and instrumentalism approaches as theoretical lens.

### ***Primordial Approach***

According to primordial theories, nations have primordial origin deeply rooted in human evolution. Nation and nationalism are organic and natural (Smith, 2009) inherent to human beings. Remarkably, nationality is part of human being, as natural as speech and smell (Özkirimli, 2010). Unlike modernism, nations are not recent modern phenomena, but they have existed since time immemorial (Smith, 2009). Modern nations are the updated version of the same ethnic communities, however. National attributes are objective, given rather than chosen, immutable than malleable (Conversi, 2007), fixed and indelible characters stamped on their members at birth (Smith, 2009). Nations are naturally occurring social groupings marked by objective cultural markers such as shared language, religion, custom, tradition and history. Consequently, nations are the primordial part of human nature with objective characteristics. Here, Ichijo and Uzelac (2005) stated that nations are not essentially modern artifacts but the extension of ethnic group. Likewise, nationalism is the primordial sentiment of emotion and feeling (Özkirimli, 2010) individuals develop to their nation. In contrary to modernist approach, primordialists argue that nationalism is

the product of nation. Thus, nationalism is attributed to emotional and intrinsic characters as ultimate explanation for national mobilization (Conversi, 2007). However, nation and nationalism might be imagined, beyond inclination to a certain group. Such theory is less valid to show the use of economic and political ends as factors of mobilization.

### ***Instrumentalist Approach***

Nations and ethnic groups don't correspond to any objective reality (Conversi, 2007). Ethnic attachments are social constructs, and ethnic bonds are not naturally existing but constructed in the society (Seol, 2008). Unlike primordialism, ethnicity is subject to economic, social and political realities, and evolves over time and space. In other words, ethnic boundaries are social, political and cultural constructs continuously negotiated and revised (Fowkes, 2002; Hale, 2008). "Ethnicity is a social, political, and cultural construct for specific and different interests and status groups... an elastic and highly adjustable instrument to serve particular or multiple objectives" (Berhanu, 2008, p. 7). The elite adjust their interests with national cleavages, and ethnicity is continuously shaped and reshaped in line with these interests. Ethnicity is nothing but it is strategic tool to gain resources (Young, 2000) by mobilizing ethnic identities. Besides, ethnicity is an adjustable instrument intended to meet changing motives. The elite construct it to mobilize ethnic groups to compete for power, resources and social status (Seol, 2008). Therefore, nations and nationalisms are socio-political and economic tool in which ethnic entrepreneurs associate cultural differences with existing cleavages.

Jones (1997) stated that ethnicity is an individualistic or collective strategy to advance socio-economic and political interests, and to minimize losses. Elites use ethnic identity as a tool to secure both individual and collective utilities (Rudolph, 2006; Young, 2000). Ethnic factors are instrumentalized to advance elites' interest and reduced to utility value. Ethnic and national attachments are continually defined and reconstructed with changing conditions (Özirimli, 2010) to be convenient instrument to mobilize ethnic groups for various purposes. Political leaders, ethnic entrepreneurs or the demagogues mobilize the community around ethnic identities, and exploit for individual or group gain (Rudolph, 2006). Remarkably, people become ethnic and remain ethnic as long as ethnicity yields significant return. Regardless of historical validity and community interest, ethnic attributes are maneuvered for promoting socio-economic and political

agendas. As a result, ethnicity becomes topical strategy to protect benefits ranging from social support to material wellbeing. This is the reason Conversi (2007) mentions that nationalism is the conscious effort of elites to access socio-economic and material resources.

In Ethiopia, ethnic groups had lived together peacefully for centuries but the post-1991 political arrangement created ethnic elites that mobilize ethnic identity to achieve economic, social and political ends. Ethnicity is instrumentalized for political mobilization (Ishiyama, 2010), and exploited to meet hidden motives. Socio-cultural realities are manipulated to derive utility, and adjusted for political profits irrespective of historical validity. Using its sensitivity, ethnic nationalism is used as a lever force to mobilize ethnic groups around the interests of the few. In other words, the issue of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism under the guise of ethnic politics are the main factors in the socio-economic and political intricacies of the country while ethnic cleavages remain in place. Therefore, It is argued that it is not the mere existence of ethnic differences but the use of such differences as an adjustable tool by ethnic elites using ethnic politics as a banner exacerbates ethnic nationalism, which threaten the very existence of the state.

### **Causes of Amhara Nationalism**

Ethiopia is a historical antiquity and oldest civilization (Bahru, 2001;Teshale, 1996). As Konti Rossi mentioned, it is the mosaic of people with long tradition of peaceful coexistence. Ethiopian nationalism is born out of internal and external factors that mobilized Ethiopians with the sense of belongingness and fraternity. However, in the post-Italy occupation era, history has been dramatically changed. The inculcation of socialism and Marxist thinking of self-determination and idea of nation and nationalities paved venue for ethnic mobilization. Students“, camouflaging national question, boomed the issue and gave momentum for identity politics (Bahru, 2014; Merera, 2004). According to Walelgn“s (1969) article, Ethiopia is the prison house of nationalities, had served as the blue print of “oppressor-oppressed” narration in the political history. Walelgn briefed the ethno-cultural domination and oppression of minorities by the north. The wrongly planted socialism betrayed Ethiopian nationalism as fake, which gave birth to oppressor-oppressed political discourse. So, various ethno-national movements categorized Abyssinia as black colonizer, and struggled to establish their own independent republic.

### **The anti-Amhara narration**

The students' movement strongly advocated Marxist-Leninist philosophy to justify the then socio-economic and political scenario. Marxism as an ideology depends on class exploitation, oppression and the right of nations and nationalities. Hence, in order not to disprove Marxism, students attempted to contextualize it into Ethiopian setting using ethnic oppression rhetoric. Walegn in his article stated the oppression thesis as "... to be a genuine Ethiopia, one has to speak Amharic, to listen Amharic music...to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear the Amhara mask" (1969, p. 2). This is the root of Amhara oppressor discourse even though it had traced back to European colonization.

The origin of Amhara oppressor discourse had directly rooted with the Italian colonial attempt. Hence, Europeans under the aegis of Italy had inculcated oppressor discourse to deteriorate the unity of the state. To realize the implicit goal of colonizing Ethiopia through divide-rule policy, Italy marked Ethiopia as disunited and land of oppression by saying "there is no such thing as united Abyssinia people but merely an Amharic minority amounting about 10% of the total population which nominally rules all the people living in Ethiopian empire keeping them under its yoke..." (Prochazka, 1935, p. 70). Remarkably, Amhara had marked as an actual threat to the colonial mission of Europe so that fabricated stories had been propagated against it. In this regard, Prochazka (1935) wrote that "the majority of people constituting the Ethiopia population are themselves the oppressed, while ruling Amharic Abyssinians are oppressor" (p. 79). Therefore, oppressor-oppressed thesis entertained by students' movement and later by ethno-nationalist forces is the extension of Europeans. Yet, who is oppressor, why oppress, who is the oppressed and what are the empirical facts are still not justified.

According to interviewees, the major triggering factor of Amhara nationalism is the widely planted anti-Amhara narration. As the quantitative data indicates, 92 percent respondents argued that anti-Amhara narration is the cause of nationalism (see table 1.1). Ethno-national movements blacklisted Amhara and marked it as an enemy. Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) in its manifesto, for instance, stated "...the national struggle of Tigray people is anti-Amhara national oppression, anti-imperialism..." (1976, p. 5). The manifesto clearly targeted Amhara as a historical enemy of

Tigray. The oppressor discourse of Amhara propagated during students’ movement became the agenda of ethno-nationalist movements as a target to be negated. Irrespective of its history, Amhara has considered as exploiter, oppressor and colonizer<sup>1</sup>. Here, an interviewee stated:

*Publicly, Amhara has considered as oppressor, colonizer and problem of the state. The political narration that deny Ethiopia, categorize Amhara as oppressor and others as oppressed became government thinking since 1991. The post-1991 legal framework, political economy and philosophy, national system and structure of the country labeled Amhara’s enmity and oppressiveness<sup>2</sup>.*

ጎበዝተዓ ወትተጋ ዳላይ ትግራይ፣ ተነስኦን ተጎበዝተነስ ትግሬ፣  
 አርኪብካበሉነ ዚኣሻ አምሓራ። አማራን አባይወግደለውእን ዳውሬ፡፡  
 ጨቆን ትና አምሓራምስታሪ ኸፀ ሓፍቶም፣ ጨቆን የአማራ ገዢዎች ታሪካችንን ቀምተው፣  
 ንዓና አብሊሎምታሪ ኸና ጎቢሎም፣ እኛን መቀመጫ ከተውታሪ ካችንን ቀብረው፣  
 አለውይምከሉብይምወለድና፣ በአባቶችን ደምእየተመኩናቸው፤  
 ንቃለስተጋሩክምልስቅያና፡፡ ሁሉምየትግራ ልጆች ታሪካችንን ለማፅናት፣  
 እስከ ሞት ሰማዕትነት ይታገልበፅናት።

(Yihune, 2018, pp. 162-163)

Books were written, false stories were broadcast and songs/poems were written to dampen Amhara and its history. For example, TPLF and EPLF (see the above poem) equated Amhara with Dergue and vice versa. Oromo nationalists such as Assefa Jaleta, Mohammed Hassen, and Ezekiel Gabisa considered Amhara as a black colonizer and equated their struggle with anti-colonial struggle of Africa and Latin America. Due to the continuously procreated oppressor rhetoric, Amhara was seen as titular and settler in its homeland (Desalegn, 2014). The oppressiveness of Amhara spilling from such narrations surfaced in post-1991 Ethiopian politics, and resulted in socio-economic, psychological and political repercussions. Seeing from theoretical standpoint, not primordial

<sup>1</sup> Focus group discussion at Burie 10 March 2019  
<sup>2</sup> Key informant interview at Bahir Dar on 08 May 2019

attributes but elites” categorization as oppressor and the spilling effect is the reason for the mobilization of Amhara.

| Items     | Anti-Amhara narrations and false discourses |     | Systematic marginalization threat |     | Survival threat |     | Eviction |     | Acquisition of estate |     |      |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|----------|-----|-----------------------|-----|------|
|           | Fr.                                         | Pr. | Fr.                               | Pr. | Fr.             | Pr. | Fr.      | Pr. | Fr.                   | Pr. |      |
| Responses | Strongly agree                              | 271 | 70.4                              | 285 | 67.0            | 261 | 67.8     | 262 | 68.1                  | 278 | 72.2 |
|           | Agree                                       | 86  | 22.3                              | 81  | 22.0            | 89  | 23.1     | 91  | 23.6                  | 75  | 19.5 |
|           | Neutral                                     | 13  | 3.4                               | 19  | 4.9             | 9   | 2.3      | 13  | 3.4                   | 7   | 1.8  |
|           | Disagree                                    | 5   | 1.3                               | 7   | 1.8             | 12  | 3.1      | 2   | 0.5                   | 13  | 3.4  |
|           | Strongly disagree                           | 10  | 2.6                               | 20  | 5.2             | 14  | 3.6      | 17  | 4.4                   | 12  | 3.1  |

\*Fr = Frequency

\*Pr = Percentage

Table 1.1 Sample respondents about the cause of Amhara nationalism

### ***Marginalization***

Due to the long held oppressor thesis, Amhara had become victim of socio-economic and political marginalization. The survey result shows that the majority (89 percent) reveals that Amhara is the victim of marginalization, whereas only 7 percent replies marginalization didn’t contribute to nationalism (see table 1.1). Likewise, interviewees stated socio-economic and political marginalization, the spillover effect of Amhara enmity rhetoric, is the contributing factor of Amhara nationalism. Amhara had experienced structural injustice, bias and exploitation in the post-1991 Ethiopia because TPLF dominated EPRDF regime legalized the *neftegna*, chauvinist and feudal categorization<sup>3</sup>. Since 1960s, TPLF, OLF and others represent their respective ethnic group, whereas Amhara had no representative. However, some argued that Ethiopian People Democratic Movement (EPDM) represented Amhara, yet it was nation-wide movement with multi-ethnic orientation and membership. According to Chuchu, the founder of EPDM, Amhara hadn’t any representative organization. An interviewee from All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) witnessed that the only ethnic group without representative in the transitional government was

<sup>3</sup> Interview with a scholar from BahirDar University on 05 March 2019

Amhara. Hence, in the constitutional making, regionalization and administrative restructuring of the state, Amhara had remained without representative organization. Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), supposed to represent Amhara after 1993, acted as a colonial agent. Here, Wubshet<sup>4</sup> stated “... those who were assigned to represent Amhara were colonial ministers to govern the colony...” Chuchu (2019) in his part argued that ANDM officials had neither moral nor legal ground to represent Amhara. This makes Amhara voiceless in the intra-boundary delimitation, economy and philosophy of the state.

In the post-1991 Ethiopia, ethnic mobilization HAS been the source of political representation, social privilege and economic entitlement (Ishiyama, 2010). Using ethno-linguistic criterion as a fundamental basis, the country has been restructured into ethnically constituted *defacto* autonomous regions. Accordingly, ethnic identity became the political philosophy, socio-economic rationalization and legal framework. Amhara is hence seen as settler and non-indigenous in the name of past beneficiary and discriminated from equitable distribution of national treasure<sup>5</sup>. Today, Amhara Regional State is the lowest in infrastructural development and the poorest region in the world<sup>6</sup>. Even during the imperial period, emphases were given to Hararghe, Asmera and Diredewa<sup>7</sup> (Emiru, 2010). In this regime too, Amhara is discriminated from macro-economic activities and lives under abject poverty because of political perfidies (Chuchu, 2019).

The qualitative data shows not only political underrepresentation and economic marginalization but also social oppression is another cause of Amhara nationalism. The long circulated Amhara allergy narration created psychological trauma and social blench. The *neftegna*, chauvinist and fanatic of the past rhetoric had intentionally aimed to distort history, culture and social life of Amhara<sup>8</sup>. Noticeably, politicians and elites engaged in frazzling speeches. The speech of Tamirat Layne, who was the prime minister of transitional government, “those who are hither of Abay are

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<sup>4</sup> Public speech of WubshetMulat who is consultant and author of the book entitled article39 in DebreMarkos 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Focus group discussion at Burie, 10 March 2019

<sup>6</sup> Aljazeera documentary, 2014, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btjxWIBCBXI>

<sup>7</sup> Interview with scholars from Bahir Dar and DebreMarkos Universities at BahirDar and DebreMarkos

<sup>8</sup> Interview and focus group discussion at Bahir Dar and Burie on 05 March 2019 and 10 March 2019 respectively.

not Amhara, they are invaders” opened the gate of organized attack against Amhara<sup>9</sup>. In public meetings, party conferences and government holidays, *neftegna*, feudal and chauvinist narration repeatedly entertained to detest and surmise Amhara. Amhara people are the most integrationist and intermarried people (Daniel, 2003; Levine, 1974) but statute of savagery, Anolestatute, has been standing on behalf of Amhara. Thus, anti-Amhara narration is planned, institutionally recognized and government sponsored to segregate, marginalize and surmise Amhara because of its identity.

### ***Ethnic Federalism***

In 1991, ethno-national movements assumed state power and commenced federalism. The ethnic oppression thesis and victim mentality thinking were rationalizations of such movements. The major rationale of the federalization is to end the assumed „Amhara dominated“ regimes and give ethnic groups equal status in the state apparatus (Aalen, 2006; Abbink, 2006). In this regard, redressing past injustices, promoting ethnic minority (Alemseged, 2004; Paulos, 2007), voiding power concentration (Cohen, 1995) and maintaining unity are among the novel basis of the federalization. Of course, federalism is not a problem by itself for it is seen as a political strategy to accommodate ethnic pluralism. However, the founding problem of Ethiopian federation is its basement: the use of ethno-linguistic criteria as an overarching socio-economic and political basis. The use of ethnic identity as a fundamental criterion to redress perceived injustices sowed the seed of another injustice. Hence, the newly installed identity based federation has become double bladed phenomenon: source of ethnic mobilization as well as ethnic tension.

Being the basis of the federation, ethno-linguistic identity becomes legal instrument of entitlement, representation and state organization. Noticeably, ethnic identity serves as a key tool of social mobilization, economic entitlement, political representation and party formation (Ishiyama, 2010). In other words, ethnicity has become the *alpha* and *omega* of post-1991 Ethiopian politics. Nevertheless, Amhara remained pan-Ethiopianist for long in spite of Ethnicization (Levine, 1974; Tegegne, 1998). The survey found that overwhelming majority (85%) stated that ethnic federalism is the cause of Amhara nationalism (see table 1.2). Yet, the qualitative data indicates that not the

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<sup>9</sup>Interview with AEUP leader at Addis Ababa on 16 May 2019.

federation but its spillover effect is the cause. Here, it is likely to argue that the federal project legalized and justified Amhara oppressor thesis ethno-national movements using the cover of redressing past injustice ethnic inequality.

Table 1.2 ethnic federalism and the cause of Amhara nationalism

| Item                                                         | Response Variable | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Is ethnic federalism the cause to Amhara nationalism?</b> | Yes               | 327       | 84.9       |
|                                                              | No                | 55        | 14.3       |
|                                                              | Total             | 382       | 99.2       |

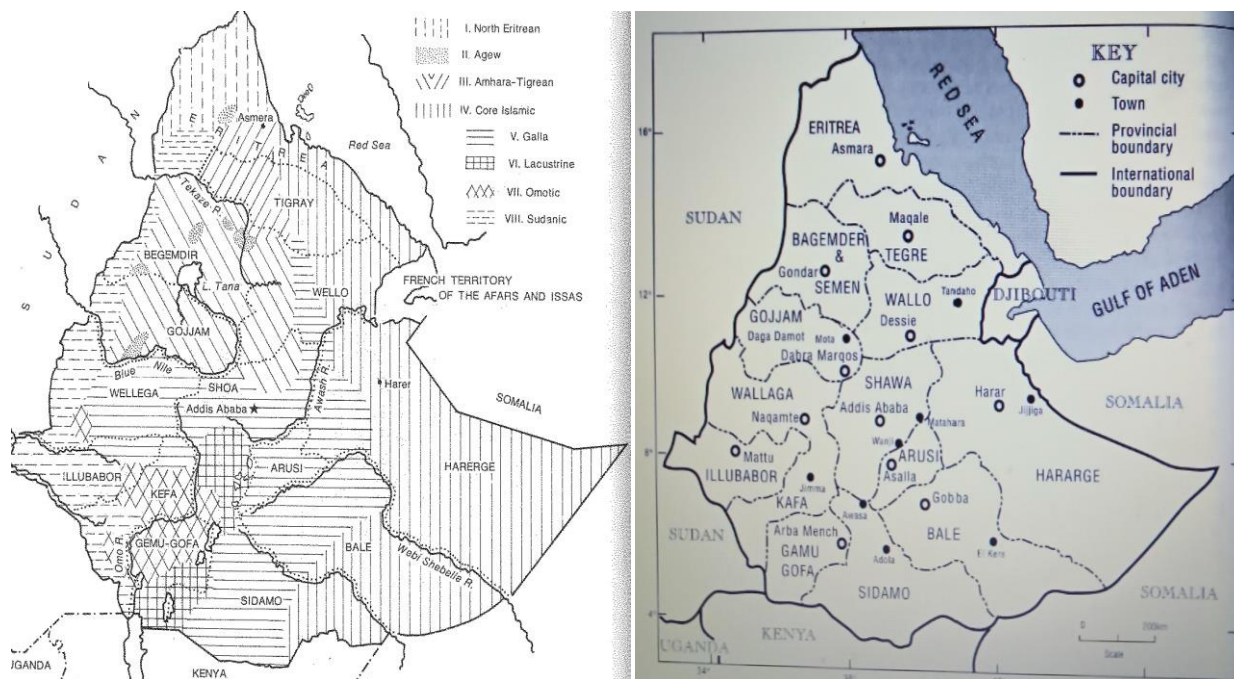
### *Acquisition of Estate*

After assuming power, EPRDF has restructured the political map of the state into ethnically constituted regions. According to art 39 (2) of the 1995 constitution, settlement pattern, language, identity and consent are the basis of regionalization. However, in actual practice ethno-linguistic identity is used as an overarching criterion (Abbink, 2006; Merera, 2004) irrespective of historical validity, natural and human resource consideration. Ironically, the new federal arrangement, supposed to be panacea to ethnic issues, is not formed through deliberation and negotiation but emerged from barrel of gun (Kymlika, 2006). Consequently, the regional demarcation has come up with a new trend of border conflict between ethnically formed regions.

The survey found that 72.2 and 19.5 percent respondents strongly agree and agree (respectively) that the issue of estate is significant factor. Put together the vast majority (91.7 percent) respondents believed that acquisition of estate is the cause of Amhara nationalism (see table 1.1). Similarly, interviewees witnessed that TPLF's hidden motive to weaken and impoverish Amhara is the rationale behind the acquisition of historical homelands. Hence, Metekel from Gojjam, Wolkait from Begemdir, Raya from Wollo and most part of Shewa are incorporated into Benshangul Gumuz, Tigray and Oromia regions respectively. Here, there are different historical archives, documentary evidences and books that show the above places were the homeland of Amhara. According to Levine (1965) and Prichard (1837), for instance, Tigray inhabited north of Tekeze River. The political and administrative map of Ethiopia during the imperial and military regime too witnessed

this fact (see the map). However, the underrepresentation of Amhara in the transitional government and false discourse opened room for the incorporation of such lands<sup>10</sup>.

Amharas who live in the incorporated places are systematically tortured, displaced and marginalized<sup>11</sup>. Table 1.4 also reveals that Amhara faces not only displacement but also genocide. As interviewees, the issue of Wolkait, Metekel and Raya are immediate causes of Amhara nationalism. In many peaceful demonstrations and public meetings, the issue of estate becomes topical agendas. In this regard, Gedu, the former president of Amhara region stated that the issue of identity is becoming an issue we cannot distance<sup>12</sup>. Besides, the issue of estate is too sensitive to the culture of Amhara (Levine 1965, 1974; Reminik, 1976) so that such issues have become political hot spots. In a nutshell, the forceful incorporation of Amhara's territory into other regions and maltreatment of Amhara in its former homelands galvanize ethnic mobilization.



Political map of Ethiopia during imperial and Derguere regime (Levine, 1974; Bahru; 2001, left to right).

## Eviction

<sup>10</sup> Colonel DemekeZewdu in his public speech at DebreMarkos and interview held at Bahir Dar on 07 May 2019

<sup>11</sup> Interview at Bahir Dar on 24 March and 07 May 2019

<sup>12</sup>GeduAndargachew press release on security issues at Amhara Mass Media Agency

Following the commencement of identity based federalization, new trend of conflict and eviction became common scenario in Ethiopia. Besides, ethnic conflicts spread to societies that did not have conflictive history (Asnake, 2010) so that ethnic federalism became intrusion on peaceful coexistence (Walle, 1993). The worst thing of the federalization is that it integrates land with ethnic identity that paves venue for small-scale resource conflicts to renovate into large-scale identity clashes. The use of ethnicity in regionalization and ethnic categorization created indigenous versus non-indigenous thinking. By reciting history in the context of their society, ethnic elites become actors of ethnic conflict and eviction (Getachew, 2018). According to Global Report on Internal Displacement<sup>13</sup> (2019), Ethiopia is one of the top states in internal displacement with a total of 2.9 million displaced people.

The survey result indicates the majority (91.7%) responds that eviction and displacement is the cause for Amhara nationalism (see table 1.1). Likewise, most interviewees unanimously stated that eviction, displacement and ill-treatment (because of ethnic identity) are pushing factors. Amhara had labeled as exploiter and oppressor so eviction, buffet and socio-economic marginalization were its fortunes for the last three decades<sup>14</sup>. Because of the long held oppressor narration, Amhara has considered as settler, invader and immigrant in its homeland.

*The manifesto of TPLF was anti-Amhara and anti-imperialism. The application of this manifesto displaced Amhara from Arbagugu, Wolkait, Metekel, Gurafereda... directly or indirectly. For instance I raised gun and went to struggle as soon as I saw about 15, 000 Amhara evictees from BenhangulGumuzregion<sup>15</sup>.*

Supporting this verbatim, The US State Department of Human Right Report stated “... Benshangul Gumuz forcefully evicted as many as 8,000 ethnic Amhara from their homes in 2014. Some evictees alleged that police beat and harassed them because of their ethnicity” (2014, p. 32). Thus, due to its ethnic identity, Amhara evicted from South, Oromia, Benshagul, Harar (Desalegn, 2014; Getachew, 2018) and other regions.

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<sup>13</sup> Global Report on Internal Displacement, retrieved from [www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019/](http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019/)

<sup>14</sup> Focus group discussion at Burie on 10 March 2019

<sup>15</sup> Interview with leader of Amhara Democratic Movement Force at Bahir Dar on 05 March 2019

Usually the eviction of Amhara is planned, government sponsored and politically motivated. The government gave full ear to its eviction and there were triggering speeches and political harassments against Amhara. In this regard, an interviewee from AEUP stated that:

*Following the harassing speech of Tamirat Layne, prime minister of the transitional government, red yellow green flag had stepped down and they sang „nefxanyaan Biyyaakeenyaairrahabahu-neftegna leave our country“, to evict Amhara in mass. To your surprise, while saying neftegna shall leave our country, they held nef-gun (16 May 2019).*

Likewise, Melese Zenawi in his parliamentary speech understate the mass eviction of Amhara from Gurefereda Woreda, Bench Maj zone of South regional state by saying

*.... The issue is a question of extremism advocated by presumed nationalist parties. What is happening in Bench Maji is, many settlers gone from East Gojjam and at present there are about 30, 000 settlers there. In Gurefreda only, there are about 24, 000 settlers. Now, Guraferda is East Gojjam from the people to the leaders practically: from the Kebele to all other positions, they are settlers<sup>16</sup>.*

The prime minister in his speech labeled evictees as settlers, which clearly reflects the long held Amhara phobia discourse and implicit motive of the government to make Amhara landless in the state. Besides, the Prime minister criminalized the evictees and those who stand for evictees as irresponsible and extremist. In such a way, the eviction of Amhara is politically justified and institutionally facilitated to negate perceived historical flaws irrespective of any empirical fact. Tesfaye Gebreab, former high officer of EPRDF argued that the intelligence office in collaboration with Harari Regional Government carried out many dramatic actions to evict Amhara from Harar (2010). This implies the eviction and displacement of Amhara is neither unconditional nor unusual, but planned, politically motivated and government sponsored.

Local authorities give green light to displace the non-indigenous implicitly and explicitly (Gebre, 2017). Of course, the titular non-titular categorization and its constitutional recognition is the legal ground to justify eviction and displacement. Amhara is considered as titular with neither economic right to land nor political representation. Hence, Amhara has evicted in mass from many parts of

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<sup>16</sup>MeleseZenawi, former prime minister of Ethiopia, parliamentary speech retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-dqM6lq6ck&t=307s>

the country because of the oppressor narration. For example, in 2018/19 more than 107, 900 Amharas are evicted mainly from Oromia and Benshangul Gumuz<sup>17</sup>. Irrespective of many years stay, while evicted, their property is expropriated and looted. This makes the eviction and displacement of Amhara common scenario in the post-1991 Ethiopia.

| Regions          | Ethnic Group | Rural-Urban Ethnic Composition |       | Total Ethnic Composition in percentage |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------------|
|                  |              | Rural                          | Urban |                                        |
| Benshangul Gumuz | Amhara       | 20.3                           | 43.7  | 22.2                                   |
|                  | Gumuz        | 25.2                           | 1.1   | 23.3                                   |
|                  | Shinasha     | 6.8                            | 9.5   | 7.0                                    |
|                  | Mao          | 0.6                            | 0.1   | 0.6                                    |
| Harari           | Amhara       | 1.2                            | 55.1  | 32.6                                   |
|                  | Harari       | 0.5                            | 11.9  | 7.1                                    |
|                  | Oromo        | 94.6                           | 22.0  | 52.3                                   |
|                  | Gurage       | 0.0                            | 5.4   | 3.2                                    |
| Oromia           | Amhara       | 6.8                            | 28.8  | 9.1                                    |
|                  | Gurage       | 0.5                            | 8.1   | 1.3                                    |
|                  | Gedeo        | 1.1                            | 0.1   | 1.0                                    |
|                  | Oromo        | 88.7                           | 54.4  | 85.0                                   |

Table 1.3 Amhara in Benshangul Gumuz, Harari and Oromia regional states (CSA, 1994)

As indicated in table 1.3, in Benshangul Gumuz region, the indigenous with constitutional right to land are Gumuz, Shinasha, Berta, Mao and Como. Amhara, the second majority in number (22.2 percent) is considered as non-indigenous with no right to political representation and land entitlement. Unlike Amhara, Shinasha (7.0 percent) and Mao (0.6 percent) have constitutional right to land and political entitlements. Moreover, in Harari regional state, Amhara, which constitutes about 33 percent of population, is marked as non-titular whilst Harari (7.1 percent) is titular with political representation and constitutional right to land. Therefore, this scenario vividly

<sup>17</sup>Fana Television News on 17 June 2019

indicates that despite its number, Amhara remained without political representation, right to land and legal guarantee. Therefore, it is fair to say that the continued eviction created sense of ethnic mobilization as a leeway from such intricacies.

### ***Survival Threat***

The survey data found the majority (90 percent) believes that Amhara faces survival threat which fuels its mobilization, but 7.7 percent argued that no survival threat is cause of ethnic mobilization (see table 1.1). The qualitative data point out that extended identity based maltreatment, oppression and identity based attack create survival question. In this respect, a scholar from Bahir Dar University mentioned that structural, designed and systematic oppression of Amhara as a people pose survival question<sup>18</sup>. The blossoming of Amhara oppressor discourse and its spillover effect make Amhara one of the threatened people<sup>19</sup>. Tesfaye claimed that clear genocide has committed against Amhara<sup>20</sup>. He added “the genocide has started from discourse: enemy, oppressor, exploiter... and all these had done. The next step is application, which is on the way”<sup>21</sup>, through political will and government sponsorship. Equally, the survey shows that more than 90 percent respondents claimed that genocide is committed against Amhara.

Amharas living in Oromia, Tigray and Harari regions, for example, are unable to use their mother tongue, exercise their culture and express their identity freely. According to UNESCO (1989, article 30), children have the right to education in mother tongue and not to be denied of other ethnic and linguistic rights. Nonetheless, regardless of such basic rights, in the signatory country of Ethiopia, Amhara children living in the above places are prohibited the right to education in mother tongue.

Levine (1965) estimated that Amhara population was about 22 million. However, after nearly 50 years, the Central Statistical Agency estimated Amhara about 20 million<sup>22</sup>. This report indicates that around 2.5 million Amharas were missed compared with 1994 census projection. If we have a look over other ethnic groups, no decrease of population number is experienced except Amhara as

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with secretary of Amhara Youth Association in DebreMarkos at DebreMarkos 24 March 2019

<sup>19</sup> Interview with a scholar from Bahir Dar University, leader of ADMF and secretary of Amhara Youth Association

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Amhara Satellite Radio and Television program on March 2019

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> 2007 National census

the census indicates. Almost in all cases, unless unexpected changes or happenings, population reduction is uncommon. But, Amhara population has decreased in millions which might imply silent genocide due to political undercount. Moreover, organized attack by ethnically mobilized groups threatened the existence of Amhara. Hence, along with marginalization, Amhara has deliberately made to be stateless, landless and hopeless to live under politically motivated poverty.

Empirical studies and experiences show that the need for independence (Suzman, 1999; Tamir, 1993) as experienced during colonization and demand for unity (Thomson, 2010) fueled nationalism. Unlike civic nationalism, the threat of domination and infringement, marginalization and feeling of rejection, survival threat and loosing of identity (Dion, 1991) are motives of ethnic sentiment and mobilization. Besides, socio-political deprivation, the seizing of territory, infringement of language and culture galvanizes ethnic nationalism. Coming to Ethiopian experience, Tigray, Oromo and Eritrea nationalism have rooted with perceived ethnic oppression and socio-economic deprivation entertained by TPLF, OLF and EPLF respectively while distorting historical realities.

| Items            | Genocide is committed against Amhara | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Responses</b> | Strongly agree                       | 274       | 71.2       |
|                  | Agree                                | 71        | 18.4       |
|                  | Neutral                              | 14        | 3.6        |
|                  | Disagree                             | 13        | 3.4        |
|                  | Strongly disagree                    | 13        | 3.4        |

Table 1.4 Sample responses about the causes of Amhara nationalism

Seeing from theoretical stand point, primordialists argue that ethnic attributes are objective and stamped of birth (Conversi, 2007; Smith, 2009), contribute nothing to ethnic mobilization. Nations are not the result of manipulation of ethnic characters for economic and political ends, rather primordial part of human nature. But instrumentalists claimed that ethnicity and ethnic mobilization are artificial creations exploited for group and individual interests (Jones, 1997). In Ethiopia, following the adoption of ethnic federalism, primordial attributes have been adjusted for power and resource purpose, and political representation, budget allocation and party formation

become have become ethnic. Consequently, ethnic elites mobilize existing cleavages against to advance personal and collective goals. The causes of Amhara nationalism, Amhara phobia discourse, acquisition of estate, eviction, ethnic federalism and survival threat are the extensions of elites' interest at the expense of Amhara. Amhara nationalism is also artificial creations entertained as a leeway and opportunity, which is in line with instrumentalist explanation of ethnicity.

## **Conclusion**

Ethno-national movements assumed state power in 1991 after the overthrow of Dergue. Identity based federalization, the byproduct of national oppression thesis, has officially instituted in the name of redressing perceived unjust ethnic relations. Theoretically, the federalization had envisioned to promote national unity, ethnic equality and giving lasting solution to ethnic issues. However, the federalization has been founded on distorted history and wrong socio-cultural setting. As a result, ethnocracy becomes an overarching socio-economic entitlement and political privilege. Civic nationalism, Ethiopiannes and meritocracy have been shifting into ethnic mobilization, loyalty and ethnocracy. Amhara have been tagged as oppressor and all historical flaws given in the name of oppressor and past privileged nation. In such a manner, Amhara phobia political system and legal framework were installed in the post-1991 Ethiopia, which yielded implicit and explicit stereotypic attitude towards it.

Amhara advocated pan-Ethiopianism in ethnically functioning state, however. It advocated civic mobilization and citizenship politics for the last three decades, whereas ethnic identity has become socio-economic and political fabric of the country. Yet, the civic mobilization neither saved Eritrea from secession nor secured Amhara from identity-based marginalization. Not surprisingly, Amhara has been labeled as *neftegna*, chauvinist and yearn of the past for backing Ethiopiannes. Consequently, Amhara nationalism emerged as hopelessness in civic mobilization as well as an exit from the interlocked problems posed against it. Hence, Amhara nationalism is tactical mobilization to curtail identity-based exploitation, marginalization and stereotype strategically under the scaffold of Ethiopia. In fact, Amhara nationalism is triggered by Amhara stereotype, marginalization and massive eviction, which are supplementary to each other. The multifaceted atrocities are politically motivated and institutionally justified for redressing its past oppressiveness. This makes Amhara landless, homeless and stateless in its country posing actual

and potential survival threat. Amhara nationalism may promote unity, power balance and quest of justice, which brings new insight in the historical narration and citizenship politics of Ethiopia. However, since nationalism is double bladed phenomenon, Amhara nationalism has to be carefully directed towards its goal.

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