

## ETHNIC CLEANSING IN ETHIOPIA

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The objective of this article is to explore the prevalence of ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia. Through the use of qualitative research methods and empirical data such as published documents, letters, and reports compiled by human rights defenders and organizations, the article shows how the ruling class categorizes a certain group of people (Amharic language speakers) as an enemy and attempts to eliminate them from the area they inhabit. Amharic language speakers living as a minority group in other regional states are persecuted or endangered. The frequent occurrence of ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia has been attributable to the nature of the government's policy of ethnic federalism and the relentless desire of the ruling class to downgrade Amharic language speakers who are considered by the government to have been former rulers.

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### INTRODUCTION

Although the systematic killing of national, racial, ethnic, and religious groups has occurred throughout the history of the world, the term "genocide" was not known until 1944 when Polish legal scholar, Raphael Lemkin, coined this term.<sup>1</sup> Following the invention of the term, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide was passed by the UN General Assembly in December 1948 and became international law in 1951.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Article II of the Convention defined "genocide" as:

Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such. [These acts include] a) killing members of the group; b) causing serious

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bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>3</sup>

In light of the above, genocide is the most serious crime done with the intention of destroying a certain ethnic, racial, national, and/or religious group.

Ethnic cleansing is the systematic annihilation or forced removal of the members of an ethnic, racial, or religious group from a community in order to change the ethnic, racial, or religious composition of a given region.<sup>4</sup> The main purpose of ethnic cleansing is to establish ethnically homogeneous lands, which may be achieved by any of a number of methods, including genocide. The term “ethnic cleansing” was used in the political sphere for the first time by Slobodan Milosevic in 1987 to define the violence of Kosovo Albanian separatist militants against the Serbs. Following this, the UN Security Council used the term to describe the mass atrocities in the dissolution process of Yugoslavia.<sup>5</sup> It is ironic that the UN itself adopted a euphemism invented by Milosevic, who is an accused perpetrator of genocide.<sup>6</sup>

The motivation behind Slobodan Milosevic’s use of the term “ethnic cleansing” was to downplay the gravity of the crime he had committed. Using the term “ethnic cleansing” serves to hide the crime of genocide, which is a quite difficult crime to detect.<sup>7</sup> As with Slobodan Milosevic, perpetrators have tried to give a new color to the genocidal acts they have committed. Such positive descriptions by the perpetrators of “ethnic cleansing” are even more common, as in the cases of the population transfers of Greeks and Turks after World War I, the mass deportations of whole ethnic groups by the Soviet Union after World War II, the expulsion of millions of Germans from Eastern Europe, the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Israel in 1948–49, and the continuing efforts to create ethnically homogeneous areas in the former Yugoslavia by Croats, Serbs, and ethnic Albanians.<sup>8</sup>

The International Law Commission (ILC) has affirmed that genocide is the destruction of a group either by physical (massacres and executions) or biological (sterilization, compulsory abortion, segregation of the sexes, and obstacles to marriage) means, not the destruction of the national, linguistic, cultural, or other identities of a particular group. International courts and

tribunals have interpreted destruction that is purely physical and biological as genocide, excluding cultural destruction.<sup>9</sup> Had cultural destruction been included in the definition of destruction, ethnic cleansing could have been an aspect of genocide, as ethnic cleansing is a total devastation of socio-cultural fabric.

Although the primary intent of the perpetrators in the case of ethnic cleansing is not assumed to destroy a political, racial, religious, or ethnic group, physical destruction is inevitable when victims are driven from their homes and forced to travel long distances where they are exposed to starvation, thirst, heat, cold, and epidemics. However, the current international jurisprudence on ethnic cleansing fails to thoroughly explain why displacement is not equivalent to destruction, and therefore, why ethnic cleansing is not equivalent to genocide.

Even though international courts and tribunals have determined that acts of ethnic cleansing constitute destruction, they have excluded ethnic cleansing from the crime of genocide because of its distinguishable specific intent—the intent to displace determines whether a policy of ethnic cleansing constitutes genocidal intent. However, the real issue is whether the intent to create an ethnically homogenous territory is equivalent to the intent to destroy.<sup>10</sup> For example, genocide for some scholars is equivalent only to the Holocaust, while there is another argument that genocide includes a variety of ethnic cleansings.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, after classifying intents as specific and general, Greg Grandin noted that specific intent attaches to “perpetrators whose actual aim or purpose is to realize certain forbidden consequences whereas general intent describes the state of mind governing the actions of individuals.”<sup>12</sup> In the first case, the act is committed with the *purpose* that the consequence would occur. In the second, it is the *knowledge* that a particular act would have a certain consequence. Accordingly, Grandin<sup>13</sup> makes an objection to the argument that the intent of genocide is different from the intent of ethnic cleansing. For Mikol Sirkin, genocide denies human groups the right to exist, displacement of ethnic groups bears a strong resemblance to genocidal destruction, and ethnic cleansing qualifies as a genocidal act when the process of forcibly removing a population causes physical destruction.<sup>14</sup> Sirkin further argues that when the general intent to displace is accompanied by the specific intent to destroy, the intent to destroy and the intent to displace coexist.<sup>15</sup> This is because a deliberate pursuit of any policy in the knowledge that it would lead to destruction of

a human group thus constitutes genocidal intent.<sup>16</sup> As a result, there is no difference between genocide and ethnic cleansing.<sup>17</sup> The intent to destroy cannot be seen only in the light of the physical disappearance of the victims; a victim devoid of psychological, social, cultural, and mental status, who is also deprived of all means of livelihood, is dead. A policy of ethnic cleansing intends to destroy.

The international courts and tribunals argue that the ethnic group, once removed, still exists, while a group, once exterminated, does not. But in the process of accomplishing the ethnic cleanser's intent to displace a targeted group, a number of genocidal acts could also be carried out. Intent is a psychological construct of an individual's motive that cannot be easily traced. The intent of the perpetrators could be speculated from the results of the criminal acts observed. Thus, the intent to destroy (genocide) and the intent to displace (ethnic cleansing) should not have been the subjects of the argument. Rather, it would have been better to prove that the criminal act is either intentional or accidental. This is because ethnic cleansing is not just a discriminatory practice; the immense brutalities depicted in ethnic cleansing make it possible for ethnic cleansing to be genocidal acts.

Thus, if a policy of ethnic cleansing is more than just discriminatory—if it also intends to destroy—then ethnic cleansing is more appropriately categorized as a form of genocide. Owing to this, international courts ought to find perpetrators guilty of the crime of genocide when genocidal acts are committed with the intent to create an ethnically homogenous territory.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, what makes ethnic cleansing similar to genocide is that human beings are attacked due to their membership in a particular ethnic, religious, or political group. In short, the clear distinction between genocide and ethnic cleansing has been a bone of contention among most legal scholars. The other striking feature of the UN definition of genocide is that it could not embrace the extermination of a political group. Genocidal acts need to be committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, but not political groups. According to this definition from the UN, genocidal regimes that commit crimes against their rival political group cannot be charged for genocidal crimes. The intervention of powerful states in the classification of crimes in the Convention has brought such discrepancy. A major reason for the Convention's failure to protect social and political groups is the Soviet Union's opposition to their inclusion during the negotiations of the late 1940s to prevent Josef Stalin's mass murders

being held to be genocidal. The United States, which has also directed mass exterminations of political groups—for instance, in Vietnam, Chile, and El Salvador—has similarly benefited from the Convention’s failure to protect them.<sup>19</sup> The gap created by the powerful nations of the United States and the then USSR has given room for regimes in the developing countries to exploit this loophole and to evict and murder their political opponents in a massive scale. The extermination of an entire political group—for instance, leftists in Indonesia or rightists in Ethiopia—does not constitute genocide under the UN convention.

Given the above, many scholars believe that the UN’s definition of genocide is conceptually deficient.<sup>20</sup> Ethnic cleansing is used as an instrument for totalitarian regimes in the pursuit of their motives of destroying a racial, ethnic, or religious group. Genocidal regimes often proclaim a need to “purify” not only a race, but a territory,<sup>21</sup> and under the banner of purifying a territory (which is cleansing in policy), they implement their genocidal intent. If ethnic cleansing is perceived as somewhat less terrible than “full genocide,” the term appears to diminish those whose destruction falls in that category.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, the reason for using term “ethnic cleansing” is as an effort to conceal genocides and define these events to have no legal impact.<sup>23</sup> The use of euphemisms and metaphors by perpetrators to cloak genocide is not uncommon, and to some extent, could be understood as reflecting shame.<sup>24</sup> Given that the distinction between crimes against humanity and genocide is narrow, several legal scholars downplay differences and even suggest converging the two crimes.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is not a mischaracterization to use these two terms—“genocide” and “ethnic cleansing”—interchangeably. After this discussion of the conceptual meaning of ethnic cleansing and genocide, this article proceeds as follows—the next two sections discuss the research setting and the prevalence of ethnic cleansing in the country. The article then deals with ethnic cleansing and ethnic federalism, followed by concluding remarks.

## THE RESEARCH SETTING

The ruling alliance, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), comprises of four elements; namely, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the

South Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF). Despite the alliance, TPLF dominated the Ethiopian political scenery and drafted and ratified a constitution in 1994. Since Ethiopian political power is confined to a very small circle dominated by the TPLF—a minority ethnic group from the ruling coalition—EPRDF means TPLF.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) established a federal system focusing on ethnic identity after ratifying the constitution in 1994. This political order in Ethiopia was imposed by the EPRDF with little or no participation by other political forces. The EPRDF's constitution Article 47 (1) classifies the member states of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia into nine regional states. These are Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromiya, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Gambella and Harar. In addition, the city-states of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa are federal cities. The constitution divided Ethiopians along ethnic lines and institutionalized their divisions. Since then, the government has encouraged political parties to be formed along ethnic lines.

EPRDF has introduced ethnic federalism and institutionalized the differences of various ethnic groups. Ethiopia is an ancient country, having multicultural and multilingual societies that are assimilated due to thousands of years of continuous interaction, intermarriages, trade, migration, and other social activities. Thus, members of the various ethnic groups did not acknowledge the existence of boundaries called ethnicity that divided them from one another. With the advent of imposed federalism, Ethiopians started observing their ethnic differences.

Since the introduction of ethnic federalism, Ethiopians are at odds along ethnic lines and the present state of Ethiopia is characterized by instability and ethnic strife between the major groups populating the territory. David Turton argues that the federal "remapping" of Ethiopia along ethnic lines by imposing a fixed ethnoterritorial grid on a population with a long history of mobility and internal migration has led to an increase, rather than decrease, of inter-ethnic conflict.<sup>26</sup> Jon Abbink supports this thesis and states the majority of conflicts in Ethiopia now dubbed "ethnic" are about land and the boundaries between territorialized ethnic groups.<sup>27</sup> Evidence seems to show that in the southern region, SNNPRS, there is a large potential for inter-ethnic struggles for regional hegemony.<sup>28</sup> A number of studies, notably the ones by Tigabu Legesse, Human Rights Watch, Fesha Assefa, and Ross

Lancaster have shown that there have been a number of ethnic conflicts in various parts of the country.<sup>29</sup>

### THE PREVALENCE OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

Statistics on atrocities, genocide, and ethnic cleansing are hard to find. Patterns of arrests and detentions in the rural areas have been far more difficult to investigate, particularly as the government's restrictions on independent human rights activity have escalated in recent years.<sup>30</sup> The underlying purpose of media censorship is to keep the public ignorant of anything going on in the country which could potentially threaten the EPRDF regime. Given the total inaccessibility of statistical data on the number of victims at the time of disputes, some respected international organizations have still tried to record ethnic cleansing reports as can be observed in the appendices. As shown in the attached three appendixes, newly accessible documents indicate that there have been a number of ethnic cleansings in the country. Different independent media agencies, including Voice of America,<sup>31</sup> Sahara TV,<sup>32</sup> Zehabesha.com,<sup>33</sup> and Ethiopian Satellite Television<sup>34</sup> are just some of the many that record the act of ethnic cleansing in the country.

The 'EPRDF Constitution' Article 32 (1) states that "Any Ethiopian or foreign national lawfully in Ethiopia has, within the national territory, the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence, as well as the freedom to leave the country at any time he wishes to." The Constitution states, that people have a legitimate right to demand the respect of their basic rights and to live in freedom without fear of persecution and extrajudicial killings. Despite this, citizens who belong to minority populations in the different regional states have been subjects of intimidation, harassment, and murder, and have been subject to deportation and persecution because of their ethnicity.

Due to the many years of continuous interaction such as inter-ethnic marriages, trade, migration, and other social activities, a significant number of farmers in the northern part of Ethiopia have moved to various parts of the country because of the previous government's resettlement policy, villagization, and the search for better opportunities. Owing to this, societies in Ethiopia are not territorially bounded. However, EPRDF elites who believe that ethnic groups in Ethiopia could be identified and territorially fixed tried to send the Amhara farmers to an area where the majority of the members of their ethnic groups are found, and started the act of eviction.

The forcible removal of these farmers did not stem from the initiative of the indigenous people but rather, it came from government officials. In a letter written to the Prime Minister, dated December 22, 2012, Yacob Haile Mariam, a private consultant and attorney at law, reported that there were no disputes and feeling of animosity between the evicted Amharic language speakers and the indigenous societies.<sup>35</sup> Yacob stated that the evicted Amharic language speakers departed the indigenous farmers with deep sorrow inside, and that indigenous farmers saw them off with the necessary food stuff. Tesfaw Muluken's research study informants also reported that the ordinary people are good and innocent as anybody.<sup>36</sup> In the same way, Fekade Shewakena noted that the only silver lining found in this whole sad story is that the local indigenous tribes and ethnic groups have not joined the officials in this crime.<sup>37</sup> The detachment of the general population from participating in the ethnic cleansing scheme would suggest that the ethnic cleansing task has been completely the result of the government plan. In a letter written to the Transition Government of Ethiopia, dated June 10, 1992, Asrat Woldeyes, President of All Amhara People's Organization, noted that the act of ethnic cleansing was a planned operation of the government.<sup>38</sup> This showed that the practice of the EPRDF government stood in sharp contrast to the public.

In a study conducted on the Benishangul-Gumuz (one of the areas where the Amhara community was deported to), Tesfaw's informants<sup>39</sup> indicated that both the federal and the regional government were involved in the eviction of the Amhara farmers and that the government has a systematic desire to make the area free from Amhara people. The involvement of the government in the act of ethnic cleansing has been confirmed by the disarmament of the Amhara farmers living in the areas. Tesfaw<sup>40</sup> stated that a plan to take the farmers' weapons was made before the act of ethnic cleansing. In a letter written to the Transition Government of Ethiopia dated June 10, 1992, Asrat Woldeyes also recorded that the regional government officials disarmed the farmers before starting the process of ethnic cleansing.<sup>41</sup> It is beyond doubt that this task of ethnic cleansing has not been an action taken by the local government officials alone. Rather, it is a joint act of the central and the local government. The EPRDF government has the absolute power to press regional leaders to adopt policies and strategies. That is why regional leaders are said to be puppets of the central government, which is manipulated by TPLF political elites.<sup>42</sup> In the act of ethnic cleansing, too, the



regional government officials could not reach this decision without TPLF's seal of approval, because the ultimate power of the government resides in the hands of few TPLF members. The EPRDF's Oromo (OPDO) and Amhara (ANDM) wings have simply endorsed decisions made by TPLF officials.

This act of removal which, was confirmed by a letter written from the higher officials, was made through an official order. In a letter dated November 1, 2011, with reference number 727 t.Ø-404, the *Shup Kebele* administrator was instructed to take over the lands from the Amhara farmers "in the name of 'illegal land holders.'"<sup>43</sup> The defamatory comments were given so as to create a pretext to deprive these victims of their property. In extending his explanation, Yacob reported that after the deportation, the regional government officials divided the wealth of these farmers among themselves. In the above letter, the farmers were named as "illegal land holders" although these people had lived in the areas for decades and they were well recognized by the government as diligent farmers. In a letter written to the Prime Minister dated December 22, 2012, Yacob Haile Mariam witnessed that the people evicted were awarded for their extraordinary performance and for the contribution they had made for the development of the areas. Tesfaw further noted that the evicted farmers were awarded by the regional government for their astonishing performance.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in Benishangul-Gumuz, the deported Amhara community had been great contributors for the development of the area.<sup>45</sup>

The regime previously had the habit of creating a pretext for its inhumane deeds. For example, when Amharic speaker farmers were evicted from Guraferda in the Southern part of Ethiopia, the late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, briefed the parliament that the farmers were "accused of destroying forests." In his statement, he didn't even care that his justification ran in violation of the constitution.<sup>46</sup> If the farmers had really destroyed forests, they should have been charged as per the constitution's provisions, instead of purging them out of the areas they had been living in for generations. No one was able to challenge the validity of the Prime Minister's speech in the parliament. Despite the baseless allegations from the government, all cases have reported that "being Amhara" was the reason for the evictions accompanied during the last two decades in the region.<sup>47</sup> The government attacked these farmers, whom they regarded as foreign enemies not because they have done something wrong, but because of who they are or what the government thinks they represent.

Apart from being forcibly evicted from their land, the victims were subjects of relentless persecution and harassment. They were humiliated, demoralized and defamed due to their ethnicity. Tesfaw's informants shared the following:

The Amhara evictees were prone to confinements, inhuman torture and death; they have locally accepted derogatory names which include *Goje* [a pejorative derived from a name of a provincial area, Gojam], *Sar Felag* [grass seeker], *Neftegna* [the former remnant rulers] and *Metie* [new comer]. The local people counted 'Amharas' like material assets. Amharas are the most out-casted societies. I have heard by my ear when a Woreda official says "You, Amharas, are rootless trees. You will come out when we need to do so."<sup>48</sup>

Based on the testimony of the victims, Amharic language speakers who have been living in these areas for decades were openly told to leave the area as "they do not belong there." To this end, the ethnic cleansing drums began to beat to mobilize the innocent youth for displacing Amharic speaking farmers after the decision was ratified by members of the parliament. In this regard, Will Kymlicka noted that young protesters who have been motivated by the regional government officials in the region were ranting "Oromia for Oromos only"—a tone that is more like the political doctrine of ethnic political elites.<sup>49</sup>

Conflicts over autochthony, literally being "sons of the soil", that began in Francophone countries,<sup>50</sup> have been common in most federal states. In Nigeria, the sub-national government in the North of the country adopted a policy of "North for Northerners," thereby barring southerners from "operating hotels and doing contract works for the [state] government, and even foreign firms were required to replace southerners within a prescribed period of time."<sup>51</sup> Owing to this, Nigerian citizens inhabiting regional-states outside their ancestral territories also experience political and economic disenfranchisement.<sup>52</sup> In Bombay, India, for example, "the 'nativist' Shiv Sena party rose to political prominence in just two years by attacking the economically dominant South Indian minority and championing Maharashtra for Maharashtrians."<sup>53</sup> Considering the desire of the government to manipulate the existing tension, the minority may use its self-governing powers to engage in implicit forms of ethnic cleansing, stripping people of their property rights and dismissing them from public service jobs. These

people were perceived as “outsiders” or as former “oppressors.”<sup>54</sup> Aligned to the thinking of “outsiders and insiders,” or “oppressors and the oppressed,” innocent citizens could feel societal resentments against these former oppressors which can encourage ethnic cleansing.

Ideologies of racial superiority, notions of insiders and outsiders, and the construction of “us vs. them” generate antagonistic relationships between groups.<sup>55</sup> The experiences of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia demonstrate that rival citizenships cannot coexist, at least not for a long time, in the same political space.<sup>56</sup> The divisive ethnic policy which continues to harbor hatred and anger toward each other results in the displacement of large numbers of people. Instability and ethnic cleansing are a direct result of the formalization and institutionalization of ethnic identity, which promotes dichotomy among ethnic groups. The rigid adherence of the government to the ideology of a “divide and rule” policy based on ethnic politics leads the nation into deeper contradictions and conflicts.

The adoption of “sons-of-soil” orientations in Ethiopia by regional states led to eviction of non-indigenous ethnic groups from the areas they have been living in for generations. There is also a report that in rural Oromiya, Somali, and SNNP regions, thousands of individuals may have been forcibly displaced in the political repression following the May 2005 elections.<sup>57</sup> In furthering this discussion, Christina Holder, Zeba Huq, and Mary Catherine Ryan expressed their worry that the Amhara exist in small pockets throughout the country and faced the risk of being overwhelmed by other ethnic groups if tensions escalate, noting that the fate of ethnic Amhara minorities, living in other regional states under the EPRDF, was much worse than any time in history.<sup>58</sup>

Tens of thousands of people have been evicted from their land and the government agents, nor the perpetrators, could not see the existence of the victims as valuable as any other member of the society. The EPRDF government has never brought the perpetrators to the court. Rather, the government has been covering up the deeds of the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing. As demonstrated by Abbink, there was no compensation for life or damage arranged by the state legal institutions, although it sometimes occurred between local protagonists.<sup>59</sup> The unwillingness of the government to bring the perpetrators to justice could indicate that ethnic cleansing has been a pre-planned program of the government, as no one was accused of or punished for this crime against humanity setting a very worrisome precedent

in a country with numerous ethnic groups and simmering ethnic tensions.<sup>60</sup>

As observed by Tesfaw, the Amhara communities have been evicted at least once in every ten years since 1993.<sup>61</sup> TPLF's main contention is to weaken and to destroy Amhara community that has been considered as "enemy."<sup>62</sup> It has been said that the main force propelling the demand for Tigrayan independence was hostility towards Amhara domination.<sup>63</sup> Due to this feeling of enmity, the EPRDF government has evicted the Amhara community and given the farming land to Tigray community.

One case in point is Welkait Tsegedie and Benishangul–Gumuz. After uprooting the Amhara community from Welkait Tsegedie, the area in Northern Gondar which had been inhabited by Amharic language speakers, the regime gave these areas to thirty thousand demobilized TPLF militiamen and four hundred thousand Tigray communities. The people of Welkait who become bilingual in Amharic and Tigrigna identify themselves as Amhara due to the sociocultural resemblance with the people of Amharic speaking society, though they are fluent in Tigrigna. But the EPRDF government puts Welkait Tsegedie in Tigray regional state due to their bilingual use of the languages. Counter to the TPLF's claim, Prince Mengesha Seyoum, the governor of Tigray Provinces during the Emperor's period, says that Tekeze River is the boundary between Begemedar (the former name of Gondar) and Tigre Provinces.<sup>64</sup>

In a similar manner, more than twenty thousand Tigray communities have settled in Benishangul–Gumuz regional states.<sup>65</sup> It is so paradoxical that Amhara communities were displaced and persecuted from their farming land in Benishangul–Gumuz, but Welkait Tsegedie and Tigray communities were allowed to settle in these areas. Thus, the prevailing ethnic cleansing is a systematic state-organized campaign of annihilation of Amhara community. Extensive eviction of the Amhara community has been carried out incessantly so as to minimize—and gradually eliminate—the population.

The root cause of this ethnic cleansing and the factor that created it is embedded in the vision set out for Ethiopia by its rulers, the TPLF/EPRDF, as soon as they took power.<sup>66</sup> Patterns of development that have favored some groups and regions at the expense of others have made the state the focus of endemic political conflict between competing ethnic groups.<sup>67</sup> The widespread misconception created by very few TPLF elites has shown that TPLF elites have developed a more hostile attitude to Amharic language speakers. When politicians act from the perspective of hatred, their actions

cloud their rational thinking, and they lack logical reasoning to define their actions as humans.

An increase in ethnocentrism could reduce the rate of assimilation, and the notion of an Ethiopian identity has been diminished to an ethnic identity. As soon as people move from their designated ethnic homeland to other regional states, they live with too much pain, and the country becomes a frightening place to live in. Ethiopia's political system and society have grown increasingly unstable, largely because the TPLF has become increasingly repressive while failing to implement the policy of ethnic federalism.<sup>68</sup> The current violence, hatred, and instability are a direct result of the ethnic politics which inflame hate politics that would jeopardize the integrity of Ethiopia.

### ETHNIC FEDERALISM AND CLEANSING

At this juncture, it is important to see the reasons why TPLF introduces ethnic federalism in the country. Some characterize "ethnic federalism" as a ready-made strategy for TPLF to stay in power by dividing the society along ethnic lines, whereas others assert that ethnic federalism was chosen for the purpose of secession, and that is why secession is part of the TPLF's Ethiopia. John Young, who generally supports the idea of ethnic federalism, also admits that ethnic federalism is the best means for the TPLF to retain a leading position in an Ethiopian state where the Tigrayans constitute a minority.<sup>69</sup> Alemante Selassie, on his part, stated that constitutionally, the country had proclaimed itself "federal."<sup>70</sup> However, the state is extremely dominated by the TPLF. All opposition parties, including both anti- and pro-federal parties, reject the current federal arrangements and the way they are implemented because they claim that it is only serving the party in power.<sup>71</sup>

Nationalist politicians responded with the charge that the EPRDF was breaking the Ethiopian nation-state into ethnic groups as part of a Machiavellian divide-and-rule strategy.<sup>72</sup> Marina Ottaway claims that the TPLF's only priority after the fall of the old regime was to stay in power and keep the control of other opposition forces that they had gained through military struggles.<sup>73</sup> Others argue that the formation of ethnolinguistic communities has been made with an ultimate aim of disintegrating Ethiopia. Mehari Taddele states the EPRDF government, as pro-secession, is relentlessly working to disintegrate the country. During the early years of its establishment,

TPLF in its Manifesto stated that it stands for the formation of the People's Democratic Republic of Tigray by seceding from Ethiopia.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the current situation could not dictate the intent of TPLF, for TPLF may not have abandoned the idea of secession. If TPLF fails to govern the country, it may resort to the second option.

The principle of federal character, far from leading to national unity, has engendered more interethnic bitterness, rivalry, and acrimony rather than lessening the pains of interethnic rivalry, and has ended up in blowing the problem out of proportion.<sup>75</sup> A former executive committee member of TPLF, Gebru Asrat, confessed that EPRDF had used ethnic federalism to create antagonism among the various ethnic groups.<sup>76</sup> Ethnic-based demarcation of regions, the development of ethnocentric and chauvinist thinking, and the erroneous thought of the local officials were the major causes of displacement.<sup>77</sup> Juergen Habermas, a distinguished philosopher, contends that Nazism was a consequence of Germany's failure in balancing the universalistic and particularistic elements of national identity, and particularism was heavily imprinted on German nationalism from the beginning.<sup>78</sup> In the same way, the EPRDF's passionate attachment to the notion of ethnic uniqueness has been creating deeper patterns of societal rivalry and downgrading national unity. The frequent occurrence of ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia can be attributed to the nature of the TPLF's policy of ethnic federalism by which our language differences have been misused and manipulated to poison relations. Ethnic federalism has institutionalized citizens in various compartments or ethnic groups, resulting in developing ideologies of antagonism among ethnic groups. In other words, ethnic politics can divide the society, and each ethnic group develops mistrust against one another.

Several scholars indicated that ethnic conflicts in different parts of the country have been caused by ethnic federalism.<sup>79</sup> Apart from this, the EPRDF government also tends to romanticize the past insignificant small-scale ethnic disputes so as to instill ethnic enmity; that is, the federal government of Ethiopia further instigates and exacerbates conflicts. Field research indicates that the Ethiopian government is manipulating existing tensions and essentializing ethnic identities, to sharpen a feeling of difference between groups and thereby to increase tension over cultural and geographical boundaries.<sup>80</sup> Political entrepreneurs who present themselves as champions of their communal groups exaggerate and manipulate the identity fear for

their own advantage.<sup>81</sup> TPLF is a renowned architect in creating commotions and chaos among communities.<sup>82</sup>

Any insignificant historic grievance can be aggravated by the retelling of real or imagined events. A case in point is “*Anolie*,” a monument found in Oromia Regional State (Arsi), showing an Oromo lady whose breasts were cut off by Amhara ruling class. The story of this monument is fabricated and told by EPRDF officials, in order to instill animosity among the Amhara and Oromo population. In furthering the discussion, Theodore Vestal noted that ethnic resentment of conquerors or rulers of decades or centuries ago is remembered as if events happened yesterday; EPRDF cadres and their servitors skillfully stir up the most sensitive memories of lingering antagonisms, long after the people who were offended are gone.<sup>83</sup> Such resentment breeds resentment, hatred fuels hatred, and the resulting animosities generate flights from neighborliness. Owing to this, the major ethnic groups, Amhara and Oromia, have been at odds with each other. Thus, ethnic federalism has become a useful tool for the regime of Ethiopia in their pursuit of dividing societies and creating animosity among the population.

The bitter conflicts of autochthony reveal the growing ethnicization of nationalism and more narrowly bounded notions of citizenship in Africa.<sup>84</sup> When ethnicity is politicized, a certain ethnic group identifies itself as having authentic origin and views others as migrants or latecomers. To purify the “authentic” group, the notion of “the true sons of the soil” is used against the latecomers. The issue of autochthony is the result of an attempt to define a certain ethnic group based on a fixed criterion of identity, as well as drawing group boundaries that exacerbate dispute. In light of this, fueled by ethnic federalism, the regional government officials in the Oromia Regional State forcibly evicted approximately hundred thousand ethnic Amhara from their homes, a gross human rights violation equated to genocide.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, the favored ethnic group, the Tigray, is left free to make use of the protectorate-ships of the current EPRDF government.

The issue of autochthony, resulting from the ethnic federal structure, also limits labor and capital mobility across the regional states, since each and every individual is restricted to a region where his/her ethnic members are found. Regional-based ethnicity is a development risk, as it limits the movement of capital and manpower required to take advantage of economic opportunities, creates entitlements that can block development, and leads to the irrational use of energy and other resources.<sup>86</sup> With globalized

markets, people need to move freely in various parts of the country, but the federal structure of the country restricts the mobility of labor, goods, and capital. Therefore, indigenous intellectuals have been largely excluded from contributing their share for the development of the country. Lovise Aalen's informants noted that Ethiopians have been recruited and hired for any governmental post based on their ethnic background at the expense of competence.<sup>87</sup> This implies that people with a Tigrayan background are consistently employed in important positions in the state machinery, in the economy, and in public services.<sup>88</sup> The party's dominance is particularly evident in the armed forces and the National Intelligence and Security Office.<sup>89</sup>

Ethnic federalism is also a basis for the violation of human rights as granted in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In this regard, the Convention Article 5(b) states:

Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, color, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:... (b) The right to security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by government officials or by any individual group or institution.<sup>90</sup>

Scholars contend that the ethnic federal arrangement institutionalizes tribal discrimination, undermines fundamental individual rights, brings in undesired competition between ethnic groups, and could result in ethnic cleansing, eviction, and disintegration.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Selassie stated that fashioning a federal system along purely ethnic lines is clearly at odds with the fundamental and universal human rights norm of nondiscrimination.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the federal system, particularly ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, could be a threat to human rights.

When it came to power, the EPRDF originally promised freedom, democracy, and ethnic devolution. However, it is highly centralized, and tightly controls the economy, as well as suppressing political, social, ethnic and religious liberties.<sup>93</sup> As a matter of principle, as Tigreans, Oromos, Gurages, Somalis and other ethnic communities have the right to live anywhere in Ethiopia, the Amhara community should also have the same right to live anywhere in the country, including in the Oromia regional state, as this is constitutionally granted. But unfortunately, this ethnic group has been



persecuted everywhere, and an estimated six million of its people are said to have been eliminated through various means in the past twenty-five years.<sup>94</sup>

For people following a rational approach, the act of ethnic cleansing does not have a firm foundation in a traditionally tolerant and heterogeneous society like Ethiopia. However, influenced by the EPRDF's ideological motives, the OPDO cadres who established by the EPRDF's policies blindly propagated what they have been told. It is sad to observe that immoral behaviors have extended from individuals to the affiliated party members.

When ethnic hatred is mobilized by elites in the context of poor socio-economic conditions, catastrophe can occur. Thus, before it is too late, enhancing democratic values and institutions that could facilitate tolerance and co-existence are indispensable. Moreover, universalistic identities, values, and institutions that go beyond tribalism and ethnic identity need to be kept alive so that the unity of the country would not be threatened, and conflicts would be avoided.

## CONCLUSION

These episodes of ethnic cleansing tended to target one ethnic group, the Amhara, which is the largest ethnic group next to the Oromo in Ethiopia. The members of the Amhara community were hunted down inside their homes simply because their native language is Amharic. Because of their ethnicity, they have been subjected to acts of injustice and harassment and are currently helpless victims. Regional states along with the so-called federal government have used their power to evict the Amhara farming communities from their regions by defaming or slandering the members of the displaced farmers with impunity. Their deeds cast a dark shadow upon the generations to come.

A key factor motivating the acts of ethnic cleansing is the ethnic federal structure introduced in the country. The Ethiopian government's decision to expel citizens based on their ethnic identities needs to be considered in this light. The architects of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia have a profound desire to impose a new social order that has reconstructed the relationships among various ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

In the eyes of EPRDF, the current situation has appeared peaceful, but the potential for trouble remains. Sociopolitical situations are malleable; people's moral and rational faculties can be nurtured to accomplish irrational acts when tensions reach unbearable heights. To prevent the continued

dehumanization and extermination of human life on a massive scale, denouncing ethnic cleansing in all its forms should be an urgent duty of the incumbent regime.

## APPENDIX

The lists included in the three tables below are not complete but sum up the main incidents. Information is taken from Human Rights Council, Moresh Wegenie Amhara Organization, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Muluken Tesfaw's text, letters, and documents.

Table 1: List of ethnic cleansing events in Ethiopia during EPRDF regime as documented by the Human Rights Council.<sup>95</sup>

<b>Places of ethnic cleansing</b>	<b>The consequences of ethnic cleansing</b>	<b>Time of ethnic cleansing</b>
Western Shoa	Unspecified number of people died and a number of people were displaced.	2013 and 2015
Benshangul Gumz	More than ten thousand people died and more than ten thousand were displaced.	2014 and 2015
Metekel	More than ten thousand people died and more than sixty thousand were displaced.	2012 and 2013
Wellega(Gida Kermo Woreda)	One thousand one hundred ten died and more than twenty five thousand people were killed.	2000 and 2008
Western Hararigie	One hundred nine people died and more than ten thousand people were displaced.	1983/1991
Western Arsie	Unspecified number of people died and a number of people were displaced.	1991 and 2006
Jimma	More than two thousand people were displaced.	2013

Guraferda	Six hundred people were killed and more than twenty-two thousand people were displaced.	2011/2015
Afar	Fifty-two people died and ninety six were displaced.	2008 and 2015

Table 2: List of ethnic cleansing happening in Ethiopia during EPRDF regime as confirmed by Moresh Wegenie Amhara Organization.<sup>96</sup>

<b>Places</b>	<b>The consequences of ethnic cleansing</b>	<b>Date issued</b>
Western Shoa	In Oromo Regional State, Western Shoa Zone, Nano Woreda, the regional government officials, on April 2015, made the Amharic speakers farmers evacuate the area because they were told that they do not belong to the region. These farmers including older people and children were forced to leave the area and they temporarily settled in the Southern Regional States in Gurage Zone, Habeshegie Woreda. In the process, one farmer died, ten farmers were injured and one hundred twenty-four residents were burnt. All these happened with the support of the local government officials.	Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Special issue, 136

Benishangul-Gumuz	<p>In July, 1992, Amharic language speaker farmers were displaced from Benishangul-Gumuz. The report stated that people were burnt while at home; people were killed in a very inhuman manner; 6833 houses were burnt; 185 schools and mosques were closed; two hundred and seventy farmers died, sixty thousand house heads were displaced. Authorities in the western region of Benishangul-Gumuz forcibly evicted as many as 8,000 ethnic Amhara residents from their homes; some of those evicted alleged police beat and harassed them because of their ethnicity.</p>	Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Special Issue, 3
Wellega (Gida Kermo Woreda)	<p>Amhara farmers living in Eastern Wellega, Beseredo, Abidenegero, Gida Kiramona, and Awano Woredas. Starting from March, 2000, government officials, members of the parliament, together with the police force attacked Amharic speaking farmers. In the conflict, properties were stolen, churches were burnt, and farmers were murdered, jailed and injured. The farmers' wives and daughters were raped. Due to this dispute, 10,198 house head farmers were displaced and they left the area. They temporarily settled in Amhara Regional State, in Bure Woreda. Soon after their displacement, eight hundred farmers died due to malaria.</p>	Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Special Issues, 34 and 38

Table 3: List of ethnic cleansing events in Ethiopia during EPRDF regime from 1991 to 2015 as validated by young researcher and journalist Muluken Tesfaw.<sup>97</sup>

<b>Places of ethnic cleansing</b>	<b>The consequences of ethnic cleansing</b>	<b>Time of ethnic cleansing</b>
East Harerigie (Gara Muleta)	Thirty-two people died and a number of people were displaced.	July, 1991
	Fifteen people died and a number of people were displaced.	February 1995
	Forty-eight people died and a number of people were displaced.	July 1990
West Harerigie (around Gelemiso, Wofie, Dansie, Anchara districts)	More than ten thousand people died.	June 1992
Arsie (Arba GuGu, Jeju, Guna districts)	Six hundred people died and more than five thousand were displaced.	May 1992
West Arsie (Arsie Negelie, )	Six thousand people died.	December 1993
Kofelie and Korie	Six people died.	November 2005
Gura ferda (Bench Maji Zone)	Six hundred people died and more than three thousand people were displaced.	September 2007
Benshangul	More than ten thousand people were killed and more than five thousand people were displaced.	2011

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