

The 1976 TPLF Manifesto and Political instability in Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Political instability is a common phenomenon in developing countries. In countries like Ethiopia where democracy is infant and the ruling government dominates the people by all means; strike, mass protest, demonstration and conflict are common features of the country. The oppressed Amhara people infuriate and revolt against TPLF dominated Ethiopian government. This article tries to investigate the causes of political instability in Amhara region, Ethiopia. The paper is qualitative type and data collected through interview and literature review. The study revealed that, the 1976 manifesto prepared by Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) labeled as the Amhara people number one enemy for the people of Tigray and decided that the Amhara must be controlled and eliminated. Thus, after taking power in 1991, TPLF have been doing all evil things against the Amhara people by using several techniques. This situation angered the Amhara people and political instability erupted across the region to end TPLF oppression.

1. Introduction

The TPLF was formed in 1975 in Western Tigray by a small group of educated individuals including Meles Zenawe, who led the TPLF/EPRDF to victory in 1991 and ruled the country until his death in 2012. Admasu (2010) states that in 1976, the TPLF released its manifesto which stated that "the first task of this national struggle will be the establishment of an independent democratic republic of Tigray," claiming that "Tigray lost its autonomy and independence after the death of Yohannes IV." From that time onwards or after the death of Yohannes IV, the national contradictions between the Amhara oppressor nation and the oppressed nations in Ethiopia, including Tigray came into the scene. Contrary to what Tigrayans believed, Eritrean Liberals who saw Haile-Sellassie's rule for what it was, a continuation of Shoa domination that began with Menelik, but Tigre nationalists presented it as an Amhara rule by an Amhara nation. Similarly, Young (1997) pointed that the Manifesto claimed that 'Tigray lost its autonomy and independence' after the death of Yohannis IV, but it did not develop a reasoned historically based claim for Tigrayan independence. Nor did it adopt the argument that Tigray constituted a colony of the Amhara, even though it was held that the main force propelling the demand for Tigrayan independence was hostility towards Amhara domination. In this formulation, Gondar, Gojjam and Wollo, which were as much dominated by Shoa as Tigray was, were transformed into oppressors because the imagined Amhara nation would include not only Shoa but all Amharic-speaking regions (Admasu, 2010).

Young (1997) further explains the ascent of Yohannis, however, did not end the cultural dominance of the Amhara. Amharic remained the language of his court, and Plowden, a contemporary European observer noted, Tigray is now almost universally acquainted with the Amharic language, and their customs, food and dress have become so assimilated to those of the Amharas, as not to require separate description, though their hatred of that people is undiminished. The nationalist

basis of the opposition to the state was further justified in terms of the divisions within the country's ethnic communities, a product of Amhara domination of the Ethiopian state (Young, 1997).

The manifesto that was developed by TPLF had clearly showed the TPLF hate towards Amhara. *Unfortunately, the Amhara people did know the manifesto before and during TPLF war against the Military government, Derg.* Through time onwards, academicians, researchers and politicians tried to explore the programs included under the Manifesto and they found it that the Amharas have been singled out as the major target of TPLF's political struggle for the empowerment of Tigrayans.

The manifesto contains two points. The first one is a Tigrayan is defined as anybody that speaks the language of Tigrigna including those who live outside Tigray, the Kunamas, the Sahos, the Afar and the Taltal, the Agew, and the Welkai. *Secondly*, the geographic boundaries of Tigray extend to the borders of the Sudan including the lands of Humera and Welkai from the region of Gondar in Ethiopia, the land defined by Alewuha which extends down to the regions of Wollo and including Alamata, Ashengie, and Kobo, and Eritrean Kunama, the Saho and Afar lands including Assab. Finally, the final goal of the TPLF is to secede from Ethiopia as an independent "Republic of Greater Tigray" by liberating the lands and peoples of Tigray (Asefa, 2017).

The manifesto further elaborates the people of Tigray have been denied their political and human rights and were hated, despised and discriminated. This injustice was a deliberate state policy of the Amhara nation against Tigrayans. The people of Tigray will continue their struggle till their honor and rights have been restored. Unless the oppressor Amhara nation stops its oppression, it will not get societal peace.

Contrary to the propagations made by TPLF against the Amhara, Salih & Markakis (1998) explained that the Amhara did not believe in Amhara ethnicity or nationalism. It is neither necessary for this linguistic group, whose elites appear unwilling to cooperate in this project, nor good for the construction of democratic Ethiopia. Salih & Markakis further explains that for the Amhara it is bad for national integration and nation building. They believed it is backward looking. It impedes the overall development of the society, it spreads animosity among people and it does not advance the cause of peace (Salih & Markakis, 1998).

2. Methodology

This article focused on investigating the causes of political instability in Amhara region. The researcher employed qualitative approach for making a detail description, diagnosis and explanation of the cause of political instability in the study area. This method is selected due to the reason that the type of data collected and the nature of the research in itself is a qualitatively explanatory type. Explanatory research focuses on why questions. It is appropriate research design to investigate the causes of political instability in Amhara region. Answering the 'why' questions involves developing causal explanations.

The researcher used interview and literature review to gather data. For the purpose of interview, the researcher selected five cities in Amhara region where major mass protest, strike, demonstration and other forms of revolt had been held. The interview data of this research was analyzed by following Miles and Huberman's (1984) three stages of analysis method: *data reduction, data display, and conclusion*. The data reduction or sensitization was used to analyze the grouped data critically by coding them, which constituted an important part of the analysis. The aim of this step is to produce systematic themes and issues from the interview data.

3. The Manifesto and Victim Construction theory of Genocide

Victim group construction theory of genocide supports the system used by TPLF to weaken and dismantle the Amhara ethnic group. Victim group construction theory of genocide have been divided into three categories the victim as the other, victim dehumanization, and victim as threat to the state (Hiebert, 2008). TPLF give different names for Amhara people and preached Tigrayans and other ethnic groups to develop hate against the Amhara.

In the victim as the other category; groups of people are classified in, in-group and out-group terms, it becomes easy to label one group as the other (Hiebert, 2008). Once a group has been identified as the other, it becomes possible to remove that group from the realm of obligation. If a specified group of people are removed from the state's sense of obligation, then there is no barrier to eliminating the group. Using the techniques of neutralization, genocidaires can deny the victim and their suffering (Alvarez, 1997). If the group is seen as the other then this denial is simpler and the elimination of those people is less disturbing. In line with this, Palmer (1998) explains the modern genocides of the Jewish people and the

Armenians involved groups that were better integrated into their community (Palmer, 1998). Before the genocide against these groups however, they were deemed to be the other and not welcomed among the broader society. It was more difficult to exclude these groups from the community, but they were successfully excluded prior to the instigation of genocide. Identifying the victim group as the other also fits theoretical models of genocide because it is difficult to kill your neighbors, but it is not so difficult to kill a stranger.

The second category of victim group construction theory is dehumanization. The process of dehumanization occurs when people are redefined as not being part of the human species meaning there is no need to protect them or save them if they are in danger (Hiebert, 2008). Like identifying victims as the 'other,' dehumanization lessens the barrier to commit genocide. The moral compunction to kill is overcome by the dehumanization process and perpetrators can act guilt-free (Hiebert, 2008; Freeman, 1991). The process of dehumanization includes different actions. The out-group is assigned derogatory, degrading, and subhuman characteristics (Alvarez, 1997). The murder of an animal is much less stigmatizing than that of a human being. Staub's (1989) theory of genocide includes an element of devaluation a widespread human tendency that serves a psychological basis as a precondition to doing harm.

In the last 27 years, the Amhara people have been made the main targets of criticism, demonization and discrimination by the TPLF government that has mobilized the whole media and state machinery at its disposal towards this goal of criminalizing the identity of Amharas. Asefa (2012) concluded that there has been continuous propaganda made by TPLF targeted the Amharas. This propaganda has succeeded in reducing the Amhara people into a population that is fit for any act of dehumanization by TPLF who continue to commit atrocities with impunity against the Amharas they identified as their mortal enemies. All these happened with the direct encouragement and incitement of the TPL.

In an anthropological research conducted for his PhD thesis in Kebessa, the place where both Eritreans and Tigrayans are residing; located south and north of Mereb River. The Tigrayan researcher, Alemseged Abbay, one of the research questions which he posed to those Eritreans and Tigrayans he interviewed was, whom do you regard as historical enemies?

From the total informants, 86% Eritreans considered their historical enemies are Turkey, Egypt, Italy and Britain whereas 82.1% of Tigrayan respondents start and with the Amhara as their number one enemy. Further, "they added we have had historical enmity with them. The Amhara will never rest until they completely subdue Tigrayans." Just as the Hutu see the Tutsi as inherently intriguers and manipulators (Alemseged, 1990).

The third category of victim group construction theory is threat to state. According to this theory, the labeling of the victim as a threat to the state makes destruction of the group plausible, genocide can be taken as the option to eradicating

the threat (Hiebert, 2008). When faced with a threat, the people of the state will most likely fear those group identified as the threat. This fear can become anger and even hatred resulting in the twisted logical position that genocide is the only way to save their nation. Through exaggeration and hyperbole, Hitler saw the Jews as a literal disease that could kill Germany if not eradicated. The Holocaust eventually grew out of Hitler's devotion to "save" Germany from death by eliminating the disease (Koenigsberg, 2009). German chair of propaganda Joseph Goebbels noted in his diary that the Holocaust was barbaric but required because there was a "life-and-death struggle between the Aryan race and the Jewish bacillus" (Koenigsberg, 2009).

Gebrmedhin Araya, the former treasure and top leader of TPLF and who left the TPLF (exiled), explained TPLF leaders taught and preached their members as follows:

The Amhara are the enemy of the Tigray people. Not only is that, Amhara are the doubled enemy of the people of Tigray. Therefore, we have to hit Amhara. We have to annihilate Amhara. If the Amhara are not destroyed, if the Amhara are not beaten up and uprooted from the earth, the people of Tigray cannot live in freedom and for the government we intend to create, the Amhara are going to be the obstacle. Retrieved at <https://www.tesfanews.net/ethiopia-rise-amhara-retards-oromo-terrorists-2016>

TPLF and its associates have consistently tried to describe the Amharas as insatiable exploiters, invaders, blood-suckers, national oppressors and parasites. The catalogues of negatively charged labels that have been hurled at the Amharas are too long to exhaust here and all these epithets have tried to place Amharas out of the realm of human community by equating Amharas to parasites. The Amharas have been invested with all kinds of enemy images that have tended to portray Amharas as less than human beings or monsters that should be dealt a crushing blow. The Amharas have been excluded from the scope of morality thereby reducing them to sub-human creatures that are fit for abuse, humiliation and degrading treatment including forced displacement, deportation, ethnic cleansing and massacre. When people such as the Amharas in present day Ethiopia are excluded from the scope of morality and made to be perceived

as psychologically distant people, their lives become expendable and any kind of mistreatment meted out to these Amharas that as a group have been reduced to a status of a sub-human creature, becomes justified (Asefa, 2012).

Asefa further elaborates, when one group demonizes another group that it slates for ethnic cleansing or genocide, it resorts to delegitimizing beliefs that are used to discredit the group that is to become victim of dehumanization. Negatively loaded epithets such as Neftegna, national oppressor, blood-sucker, parasite and chauvinist have been interchangeably used by various political actors including the sons and daughters of Amharas in the days of revolution to portray Amharas as "nationaloppressors". In line with this, Achamyeleh (2016) TPLF has never ceased its attack against the Amhara people; in fact, with the national resources at its disposal, it systematically and unashamedly continued its anti-Amhara agenda in the entire country. Many instances could be presented. However, on a regional focus, the Amharic speaking areas contiguous to Tigray State have been recipients of the brunt of the atrocities. One of the methods used by TPLF to erode away Amhara identities is the dislocation of Amharas from the area and settling thousands of former TPLF fighters from arid and infertile lands of Tigray to the more fertile land of Wolkait-Tegede region. It took steps to change the administrative language of the area, started producing documents and stories to inculcate the "Tigrayans" of Wolkait.

The 1976 manifesto labeled the Amhara as the worst enemy for Tigray people as mentioned in the above. The Amhara people did not have the opportunity to know the programs included under the manifesto so as TPLF left it secret. Through time, former TPLF members exposed the Manifesto at the same time academicians and researchers have been conducting research on ethnic federalism helped the Amhara people to know regarding the manifesto. Not only that, practically the Amhara people faced strong exclusion in all federal and regional affairs and has faced mistreatment across the country. Scholars and politicians demanding the government to end such systematic exclusion and mistreatment but the problem resumes till 2016. Finally, problems reached climax and political instability erupted across the region.

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