
**THE TRANSITION OF AMHARA NATIONALISM FROM PAN-ETHIOPIA TO
ETHNO CENTRIC ORIENTATIONS**

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ABSTRACT: *Nationalism, although an old concept, remains a dominant narrative in political science literatures and political discourses. Ethiopia, as a multi ethnic state, had been a political battle field for ultra and pan ethnic movements. However, in Ethiopia all ethnic groups do not have an ethnic claim. A common example for this is an Amhara ethnic group. Amharas have had strong identification with Ethiopia while the country was engulfed by ethnically oriented political movements for almost five decades. Nevertheless, unlike to the historical records of Amhara elites as Pan Ethiopic force, the last four years of political experience in Ethiopia shows the shift of Amharas towards ethno centric orientations. The purpose of this article is to examine factors which drove out Amharas as a Pan Ethiopia political force, identify the turning point of Amharas transition to ethno centric orientations and state its peculiar characteristics. It used interviews, observations, discussions and qualitative judgments of popular sentiment in Amhara as a methodology. It is found that structure and practice of EPRDF's rule, EPRDF intellectuals' error and uneven diffusion of development in the country are behind the transformation of Amhara from pro-state to pro-ethnic political orientations. However, this transition is undergone not in a manner that erased the prior commitment of Amharas to Ethiopian identity but as a new mode of opposing the ethnic-centered realm in neighboring regions.*

KEY WORDS: amhara, welkait, pan ethiopia, emergency nationalism, transitory nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The power that nationalism demonstrates now and then continues to demand our continual engagement with it in terms of understanding why and how it remains a dominant narrative. It has enormous emancipatory potential in terms of mobilizing disadvantaged groups to struggle for their own social, economic and political betterment. But it also has destructive potential in the sense that it could be used by powerful groups to marginalize and subjugate the weaker ones (Kumar D., 2010). It is the most potent political principle that holds the nation should be collectively and institutionally expressed (Brendan O., 1997). This feeling strongly attached to the nation and the state that purports to represent it—is often associated with belief in national superiority and with

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hostility to outsiders (Frederick S., 2011). It emancipates the marginalized groups but sometimes risk the survival of states.

The Amharas argue for the pro Ethiopia nationalism for decades that rests on the assumption that in multi-ethnic states like Ethiopia the stresses on non ethnic principles of the nation as regulator of political discourse can contribute to the stability needed for overall national development. However, nationalism in any form is a powerful and persistent ideology of belongingness that can evolve overtime (Jone D., 2009). The nature of nationalism varies over time and it is not the static phenomenon (Dogan, 1994).

The continuous ethnification of the Ethiopian politics by ethno centric TPLF leaders overshadows other forms of association and identity in all circumstances and made ethnic-group interests have priority over all others. As a result of which the Amhara's ethno centric orientation begun to originate since 1991 with the formation of the political organization named All Amhara Peoples Organization². However, the Amhara nationalism profoundly increased in form, scope and content by the social, economic, cultural and political forces of EPRDF³ leadership for the last four years. It is an emerging nationalism, due to this, empirical studies about it is limited. There are multiple factors for this catastrophic political transition. Cultural differences are real but what creates this Amharas transition from pan- Ethiopia to ethno centric orientation is not primordial. My intention in this article is not to argue the Amharas forgotten their parent Ethiopia and completely engaged in the problems of their ethnic group. Instead the attempt here is to show why the Amhars began to think, mobilize and fight for Amharas in their region and beyond. The purpose of this article is to examine why this transition happens and state some of the peculiar characteristics of the Amhara's ethno centric orientation.

Methodologically, the results of this article are rely on different literatures empirically and theoretically related with the theme of the article, observation of the current political metamorphosis which going in Amhara region, discussions and qualitative judgments of popular sentiment in Amhara. Moreover, this outline is constructed from the writings, speeches, and programmatic pronouncements of prominent politicians from the ethnic group which is in question. How and why the Amharas contempt to transfer from Pan Ethiopian orientation to Pan Amhara direction is the main look at questions of this article.

The rest of the article is divided into two major sections. Before I switch to the main course of the article i.e. how and why the Amharas transit from their pro Ethiopian to ethnocentric orientation,

² According to the founding father, Professor Asrat Woldeyes, of this organization, AAPO, was crated not as TPLF and OLF fashion to seek independence from Ethiopia rather to serve as a rescue or emergency organization for the people who externally identified as "Amhara" by the time; was without a political party in its own name. The organization's shift towards multiethnic political movement, All Ethiopian People's Organization, can be a balance sheet for this argument.

³ Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front

it is pertinent to define what the term nationalism epitomize and typologies of nationalism (section 1), then I will paint how and why the Amharas are in transition from Ethio-to-Ethno nationalism (section 2) and finally it will end up with summary of findings and conclusion.

Section 1: Conceptual Framework: Meanings, Theories and Typologies of Nationalism

Nationalism: Definition

Nationalism is not a new concept; its origin can be traced back to the Hebrews and Greeks (Mohammed B., 1980). Though there is general agreement on the importance of this concept, unfortunately no such agreement exists still on an operational definition and a realistic theory of nationalism which may be employed in the study of its growth in the different parts of the world. Nationalism, the most potent principle of political legitimacy in the modern world, holds that the nation should be collectively and freely institutionally expressed, and ruled by its co-nationals (Brendan O., 1997). According to Mohammed B. (1980) nationalism is the group consciousness that breeds a sentiment of unity, feeling of oneness and like mindedness among themselves. It denotes a people's sense of collective destiny through a common past and the vision of a common future.

Nationalism that has been defined by Hah, Chang and Martin (1975) seems to be more appropriate and practical. They have proposed nationalism as organizationally heightened and articulated group demands directed toward securing control of the distributive system in a society. The careful analysis of definition provides four necessary and collectively sufficient conditions for the development of nationalism.

1. The demands must be organizationally heightened. As Fishman (1972) suggests, nationalism is a structured response to common social influences. A degree of organization among the involved groups is essential for goal-directed activity.
2. It is composed of articulated demands rather than sentiment or ideology.
3. Groups are the carriers of nationalism, it is not expected that these demands are to be randomly and equally distributed throughout society; in each society they tend to be articulated by certain groups within the community.
4. The demands are for the control of the distributive system, both political and economic, in a society.

It is an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of self-government and independence on behalf of a group, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential "nation"⁴ (A.D. Smith, 1983). This ideology relegates other forms of association to a secondary, and even inessential, principle of a stable and legitimate political order. It suggests that

⁴ It is a group of human beings, possessing common and distinctive elements of culture, a unified economic system, a sentiment of solidarity arising out of common experiences, and occupying a common territory (Kumar D., 2010).

law, reason, utility, material prosperity and social justice are secondary principles in establishing a stable and legitimate political order (Brendad O., 1997). Political tribalism is its major defining characteristics.

It aimed to the creation of collective political organization and action across the boundaries of communities, first against the power of the state and then, increasingly, against the competing interests of other emerging rival ethnicities for access to the state and control. It requires the existence of 'other' and thereby the distinction of insiders and outsiders. It is a process of boundary setting, making distinctions, involving a dialogue between insiders and outsiders in which the characteristics of different groups are both ascribed and chosen, instrumentally manipulated and socially shaped (Brule B., 1998). Therefore, it is an attachment to certain social group, usually to an ethnic group that can be defined through different approaches.

Approaches to Define Ethnicity

Within the social sciences, there has been a debate on the conceptualization of ethnicity, whether it is primordial or socially constructed. The initial analytic models of ethnicity of post-1945 African studies were primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism (Ibid). The dominant view today, however, is that ethnicity is socially constructed (Alem H., 2004).

Instrumentalism focused on the manipulation of ethnic identities and loyalties for political and economic ends. This approach alerts us to the contingent, situational and circumstantial use of ethnicity in the pursuit of material advantage. The primordialist model insists on the non instrumental, deeply affective and emotional character of ethnicity and its necessary origins in real culture experience that differentiate it from other bases of political identity and mobilization. Primordialism emphasized the archaic cultural basis of ethnic identities (Ibid). The understanding of ethnicity as socially constructed focuses on it not as a fixed primordial identity but as outcome of the continuous interaction of political, economic and cultural forces both external and internal to developing ethnic communities (Brule B., 1998).

The constructionist approach underestimates the power of taken-for granted attachments and identities, and argues that people's identities are socially constructed and reconstructed in the context of historical and sociological situations (Alem H., 2004). For the constructivist approach ethnicity is not a fixed condition or essence, but a historical process. It constructed in societies containing multiple and conflicting versions of culture and custom, as well as divergent interests and conflicts of generation, clan and faction. Ethnic collective action, according to Mozaffar (ND), is predominantly a process of strategic political interaction between self interested actors with divergent interests. Nonetheless, it cannot be conjured out of thinair, it built on real cultural experience. Before ethnicity is the basis for political mobilization and action, it must be a work of intellectual construction, an imagining or invention of a common history, language and culture, typically expressed in oral or written texts combining and reworking both old and new (Brule B., 1998).

The literature of nationalism may be divided into two general theories: one which views nationalism as a process of successive integration of social groups for the purpose of instrumentalize it (integration theory), and another which views nationalism as a process of conflicting relations among social groups as a result of primordial factor (conflict theory).

Integration Theory of Nationalism

For this theory nationalism is the process of bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of a national identity within that unit (Shulman, 2003). Two different operations will happen within this theory of nationalism. The first explains nationalism as a process of social communication with particular emphasis upon group organization, and the second explains nationalism as a process of modernization with particular emphasis upon the society as arena. According to this theory social communications among the members are the pre-requisite for a sense of group integration in a society and it is modernization that promotes group organization through intensified social communication, accompanied by the erosion of primordial loyalties. It intensifies level of communication through creating socio psychological bonds which link individuals in various regions within a society (Gilbert, 1998). Consequently, nationalism takes root in a society for the purpose of linking traditional modes of social organization with the new roles forged by the modernization process (Mohammed B., 1980). But this integrative theory of nationalism had faced an anti-thesis from an alternate theory called conflict theory of nationalism.

Conflict Theory of Nationalism

The conflict theory of nationalism focuses upon the conditions under which social groups perceive their common interests and form social organization to become competitors for power (Ibid). The theory believes competition among groups gives rise to demands for control of the distributive system (Kellas, 1991). This generates new patterns of social behaviour and ideas that questions the legitimacy of the distributive system and led to conflict. In a conflict situation, the level of group identification is intensified and group integration begun to develop. Because the parties to the conflict view their positions as mutually exclusive, the conflict takes the form of a zero sum game for the control of the distributive system. When this process takes place at the social level, nationalism is generated. The conflict theory relates nationalism to economic, social and ethno-cultural conflicts among the groups in a society (Shulman, 2003).

To sum up, integration theory of nationalism suggests modernization causes groups to become integrated at the societal level. Conflict theory of nationalism suggests groups make nationalistic demands when confronted with unacceptable level of inequality in the distribution of valued resources. Integrated groups are not likely demand control of a distributive system unless they perceive an unequal distribution of resources. Conversely, groups are not likely to exert these demands unless they have attained a certain level of integration. So, group integration and a perceived situation of inequality are necessary for the rise of nationalism in a society. Groups are integrated to the point where they perceive their common interest and then act for gaining control of the distributive system of the society. Most of the previous nationalist movements were directed

against the oppression and injustice of the foreign colonial rule. But recently it is for the control of distributive system in the society. The most distinctive feature of this movement is that it is directed against oppressive ruling elite in an independent state (Mohammed B., 1980). Informed by this conflicting theories and other intervening factors nationalism is divided in to different typologies.

Types of Nationalism

Gellner (ND) identified some typologies of nationalism (1) Satisfied nationalism in which the power-holders and non-power-holders are co-cultural and co-nationals; (2) Classical Liberal nationalism in which some have power and others do not, and this difference correlates with cultural difference; and (3) Ethnic nationalism in which power holders have privileged access to the central high culture, while the powerless are also the educationally deprived, sunk in low cultures. The small intelligentsias of the powerless spearhead efforts to make their low culture into a high culture (Brendad O., 1997).

Despite the availability of some other classifications of nationalism, however, there are two major types of nationalism which are relevant to the case in Ethiopia and Amhara. The conventional narrative of European history asserts that nationalism was primarily liberal in the western part of the continent and that it became more ethnically oriented as one moved east. Kohn and Hayes, who are credited as ‘the twin founding fathers’ of modern academic research on nationalism, had introduced one of the basic and long-lasting distinctions between a “good” nationalism and “bad” nationalism (Kemilainen, 1960; Hobsbawm, 1992 and Shafer, 1976). It gave rise to quite a widespread distinction between civic (western) nationalism and ethnic (eastern) nationalism. According to Kohn (1929) these two types of nationalism were the product of different social classes.

Non-Ethnic /Civic Nationalism

According to Krzysztof J (2010) civic or non-ethnc nationalism is associated with the West. It argues that all people who live within a country’s borders are part of the nation, regardless of their ethnic, racial, or religious origins. This is liberal or civic nationalism that most apt to emerge in states that already possessed a high degree of ethnic homogeneity. But the liberal view has competed with and often lost out to a different view, that of ethnonationalism. John Plamenatz as cited in Krzysztof J (2009) builds directly on Kohn's typology in his famous study called *Two Types of Nationalism* retains that the civic or Western nationalism is more benign. James Kellas (1991) refers it as inclusive and liberal in form. For Kohn (1929) western nationalism was integrative as it appeared after emergence of national states and aimed at consolidating them. This type of nationalism is found in short supply in multi-ethnic stats like Ethiopia. But some ethnic groups within heterogeneous states may manifest a civic nationalism rather than ethnic nationalism. A common example in Ethiopia with a non-ethnic nationalism is an Amhara ethnic group.

Ethnic Nationalism

The core of the ethno nationalist idea is that nations are defined by a shared heritage, which usually includes a common language, faith and ethnic ancestry. Ethno nationalism draws much of its emotive power from the notion that the members of a nation are part of an extended family, ultimately united by ties of blood (Krzysztof J., 2009). It is the subjective belief in the reality of a common “we” that counts. The markers that distinguish the in-group vary from case to case and time to time, and the subjective nature of the communal boundaries has led some to discount their practical significance (Jerry M., 2008). John Plamenatz (1973) retains that this nationalism is hostile, illiberal, oppressive and dangerous. It is considered as exclusive and often led to authoritarianism (Kellas, 1991). It is subversive and divisive since it preceded the emergence of national states and was directed against existing political entities aiming at redrawing state boundaries along cultural lines (Krzysztof J., 2010).

Thus, nationalism can be distinguished according to criteria of membership in a nation, which may be civic or ethnic. In the former case membership is identified with citizenship and it is open to everyone who can declare loyalty to a shared set of political practices and values. In the latter case, nationality cannot be changed because it is not a matter of individual choice but of biology or culture (Greenfeld, 1995). A careful analysis of this types of nationalism points us the Amharas were civic nationalists since they deem that loyalty need to be given for the state, i.e. Ethiopia, with which anyone has a citizenship relation. But the political metamorphosis that going in the Amhara region and parts of the country where the Amharas live told us the slither to ethnic nationalist orientation. Different from the history of Amhara’s engagement in politics now days there is unification and struggle along Amhara ethnic lines since 1991 but intensified since 2017.

Section 2. Findings of the Study

The Post 1991 Political Developments in Ethiopia

Ethnic nationalism which implies the mobilization of one’s own ethnic group against marginalization was started in Ethiopia before 1991. The period 1991, however, marked the ethnification of Ethiopian politics. The TPLF⁵ lead Ethiopian government engaged on the creation of different People Democratic Organizations along ethnic line. This had opened the gate for the proliferation of political movements along ethno-linguistic lines which is a huge blow for pro-Ethiopia nationalists where the Amahars are dominant. Ethnic-pluralism-based principle of political organization that meant to maintain the unity of the Ethiopian peoples and the territorial integrity of the state through the recognition to the principle of pluralism and ethnic equality had intensified the ethnic divide. According to some observers ethnic-pluralism-based federalism serving the pragmatic purpose of ensuring political stability over all of Ethiopia by creating enough political space for multiple ethno-nationalist organizations in order to avert “ethnic revolts”. However, it invites ethnic conflict and risks state disintegration had endangered the survival of the Ethiopian state.

⁵ Tigrayan People Liberation Front

The Amhara elites who lost power to Tigrayan consider the government as a traitor for the Ethiopian national identity that created a serious opposition from them. Alem Habtu (2004) argues that the Amharas are among the most privileged ethnic groups in Ethiopian history. However, there is a critical contrast between their social and economic strength and their political weakness during the post 1991 periods. The abrupt change in the balance of forces in Ethiopia left the Amhara embittered and hostile to other ethnoses. Aided by such developments the Amharas begun to transform themselves from ethnic category to ethnic nationalism.

Amhara: Ethnic Category, Community and Nationalism

Smith (1973) makes a useful distinction among ethnic category, ethnic community, and ethnic nationalism. An ethnic category is seen as a distinct cultural group that has little or no sense of its common ethnicity. An ethnic community (Ethnie) is a human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural element. Ethnic nationalism is a consequence of the politicization an ethnic community through consciousness towards it. Therefore, one of the self-appointed tasks of nationalists is to turn ethnic categories into ethnic communities, and ethnic communities into ethnic nations (Alem H., 2004).

If we look at the Amhara, whether they are an ethnic community, or an ethnic category at all, it has been a bone of contention. Solomon G. (1993) asserts that:

Amhara does not necessarily imply a distinct ethnic category. Those who speak Amharic today do not have any ethnic affiliation to each other. There is no intra-Amhara ethnic consciousness. There is no distinct sociological profile of an Amhara because there is no such thing as an Amhara with distinct ethnic attributes. The Amhara is a multi-ethnic group who speak Amharic.

This individual considers Amhara as ethnic category and believes it took the name from abroad without Amhara consciousness from within. The Amhara are an (externally defined) ethnic category and perhaps an ethnic community, according to him.

But since 1991 Amhara ethnic nationalism began to emerge, as symbolized by the formation of the All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO). But it is difficult to imagine it as the full-fledged “Amhara” political organization. It was not formed from the deep rooted mass “Amhara” consciousness rather it was made to resemble the winds of the time and to give some choice for the people who were without such type organization in its own name. I can argue that the 1990s ‘Amhara’ nationalism was an emergency nationalism⁶ rather it is the recent phenomenon, seen for

⁶ Emergency nationalism I mean a form of nationalism that is in motion by elites of certain ethnic group who feels the danger of their co-nationals whom without an ethnic oriented political party while the country is engulfed by ethno nationalist movements. It is a kind of nationalism which is in motion without mass consciousness.

the last four years. The unique feature of the Amhara's case is it is not just ethnic nationalism; the situation is more appropriately seen as both territorial and ethnic nationalism. It aimed to build Amhara regional state which comprises all Amharas forcefully and unlawfully living in neighboring regions such as Tigray and Benishangul.

The Amharas' Transition from Pan Ethiopia to Ethno Centric Orientations

Amhara ethnic group was the spearhead in the creation of the modern Ethiopia and dominant in politics till 1991. The 1991 transitional government of Ethiopia inaugurated a new strategy of state building by proclaiming the unconditional right of every nation in the country to self determination, including the rights of self-governance, cultural autonomy, as well as secession. Following this Amhara mobilization took place and AAPO, which is highly critical of the government, was formed as a political movement in 1992.

AAPO though crated with an Amhara prefix, it had a pro Ethiopian orientation even oppose the ethnic federal structure. This show despite organization in Amhara has such party manifestation it is not like others to create the national independent state of their own as manifested in other ethnic movements in Ethiopia such as among the Tigres, Oromos and Somalis. In Amhara the nationality of the governors was not a fundamental issue of legitimacy; the people simply ask whether their rulers are less corrupt and grasping, or more just. Shared linguistic and cultural communication was not essential to the preservation of social order and effective interaction in Amhara. However, just as all other themes of politics national identity and national interests are not uniform across the population, neither are they static across time.

Nationalism can undergone a process of modulation and adaptation, according to different eras, political regimes, economies and social structures. For this reason now the classification of people by culture and language is started in Amhara. A shared culture is now much more important in creating and sustaining social cohesion than it was in Amharic speaking communities. This change beg the question: what forces alter Amharas' national identity, national interests, or national policies? This Amharas' transition towards ethno centric orientation can be associated to the interaction of multiple factors. It is found that three very inter-related factors such as the structure and practice of EPRDF's rule, EPRDF intellectuals' error and uneven diffusion of development in the country are responsible for Amharas transition from Ethio-to-ethno nationalism.

The Structure and Practice of EPRDF's Rule

The structures and practices of the EPRDF rule that classifies and demarcates the people based on cultural manifestations had contained Ethiopian political processes within the categories of ethnicity and encouraged pan- Ethiopians' to think ethnically. It disrupted Ethiopian societies along a number of social axes and introduced a number of new sources of cleavage. It has opened new sources of wealth and power for some and threatened the social position and access to resources of others. It is within these intersecting social, cultural and political processes that the social construction of Amhara ethno centric orientation has taken place. The Amharas transition towards ethno centric orientation from their pan Ethiopia position emerged out of the consequence

that Amharas unable to take advantage of the opportunities of EPRDF structure and practices of rule.

The radical departure from the unitary policies of the two previous regimes and the virtually singular focus on ethnicity provoked immediate opposition from pan-Ethiopian nationalists dominated by Amharas. Ethnicity thus became an issue in Amhara people precisely because previous Ethiopian identities and solidarities were being called into question, and ethnic identity provided a stable core of belonging. Certainly the most important reason for the development of Amhara ethno national consciousness is the creation of ethnically divided regional governments which ignored absolutely Amharas' Pan Ethiopia nationalist orientations, settlement pattern and sense of history.

EPRDF Intellectuals' Error

The strategic logic of political control in the EPRDF's Ethiopia rested on a particular application of divide and rule or a practice of fragmenting and isolating pro- Ethiopian political activity within the confines of local administrative sub-divisions to inhibit the spread of opposition and resistance. The leadership is unable moderate its sub-nationalist communities within overarching legitimate constitutional states based on Ethiopian principles that the Amhara elites were looking for centuries.

Intelligentsias who experience blocked political mobility along Ethiopian lines, and who share cultural and linguistic traits with Amharas experienced multiple humiliations in Amhara region and discrimination in labour markets and public offices in other region with Amharic background, provide the personnel for Amhara ethno nationalist movements. There is a growing realization that assertive and dogmatic Ethiopian nationalism is counter-productive to the Amharas i.e. loss of the part of the "Amhara territory" to Tigray and Benishangul and loss of development for the Amhara people despite others be able to develop in their ethno centric orientation. It encouraged political parties and political activists who had been in Pan Ethiopia orientation concept of an integrated, cohesive, multicultural national Ethiopian state appear to be shifting slowly towards the ardent Amhara ethno-nationalists orientations.

Uneven Diffusion of Development

There are diverse and sometimes contradictory theoretical explanations about the link between economic inequality and nationalism of whatsoever type. The cohesion theory argues that people are more likely to see themselves as part of a single, unified nation when their economic circumstances are indeed more similar; divisive disparities, on the other hand, impede any sense of nationhood from developing (Shulman, 2003). Deutsch (1964) wrote that when economic inequality is left unaddressed reducing attachment to the purported national community. Analogously Brown, (1998) argue that sharper differences in economic circumstance encourage the emergence of political entrepreneurs who attempt to develop new national identities among disadvantaged members of society, different—and rightfully apart—from the nation asserted by

the existing state. Because of uneven development in Ethiopia, certain regions and places continue to remain in a backward state.

The intelligentsias from the deprived groups harp on their separate distinctive identity as a means and weapon for overcoming the structures of inequality (Kumer D., 2010). The result is the birth of ethno nationalist movement. The Amharas current ethno centric manifestation is related with uneven development among regions in Ethiopia. During interview one of the interviewee said “the industrialization of Mekelle (Capital of Tigray Regional State) and the marginalization of Bahirdar (Capital of Amhara Regional State)” is the reason for this transition. The drive toward equalitarian ethnic pluralism to enhance ethnic harmony based on mutual respect and reciprocity eroded by the intensive industrialization of Tigray at the expense of others. It is widely accepted that Amhara nationalism took form as reaction to the combination of these factors but triggered and energized by one most important incident that happened at the City of Gonder on July 16, 2017. The moment on this date had shifted the ethno national consciousness from the small circle of individuals towards the wider Amhara public and it widely credited as the turning point for Amhara’s political struggle.

A Turning Point in Amhara Nationalism: July 16, 2017 Gonder Incidence

The major turning point for the Amhara ethnic consciousness comes after the federal government militarized attempt to assassinate or kidnap the retired ex-military men who was leading the committee called Welqait Amhara Identity Returning Committee. The committee is created with an aim of assuring the people in the West part of Tigray in places called Welkait, Setit Humera and Tselemiti an Amhara identity and bringing the places and people there under the Amhara Regional State Administration. The Ethiopian federal government dominated by the TPLF in attempt to maintain the territorial integrity of home Tigray region tries to foil Committee’s vision with the assassination or kidnapping of its outspoken leader viz Coronel Demeke Zewdu who stationed at City of Gonder. However, the federal government had faced unexpected backfire and the incidence changed entirely the political atmosphere in Amhara region. The clash between Coronel Demeke Zewdu and armed groups with the federal police uniform and the demonstration occurred following this clash in Gonder was important in politicizing young Amharas about ethno nationalism. In any case, this incidence constituted a turning point in ethno nationalist expression in Amhara. It developed independently by the association called Welqait Amhara Identity Returnee Committee, however, giving the rise of demonstration and violence in the region shouting for the purpose as the committee.

Before this historic turning-point, the Amhara people and its elites were much more inclined to the State than their co-ethnos. The incidence shed light on the deeply emotional character of Amhara nationalism. It was the crisis in Welqait which probably contributed the most to the rise of Amhara nationalism. The popular support for a pro-active and aggressive policy of reunification Amharas in Welqait, Raya and Metekel towards the mainland of Amhara region came after the incidence. Therefore, ethno national consciousness in Amhara is not developed in a full extent by political developments internal to the people; rather it is more induced from political forces out from the people.

Induced Nationalism

The Amharas are credited in Ethiopian politics with their leaning towards the state and made numerous political organizations that fiercely criticize ethno nationalism. However, due to aggressive counter measures against the Amharas' pan state mobilization from a pro ethnic Ethiopian government they began demobilization from the state line. The mobilization along ethnic line started in Amhara these days is induced and came to exist due to external influences. Successive waves of discrimination and attack against them and the increasing proliferation of ethnic based political parties which are in variance with the basic existence of the Amhara people have engendered serious ideological challenges to the traditional, pro Ethiopia notion of Amhara's identity. Ethno nationalism in other ethno regional states in Ethiopia triggered a reaction in Amhara. The Amhara ethno national consciousness is defined to a great extent by the proximity of other nationalisms such as the Tigrayan nationalism in north which had very expansive motive to conquer Amhara territories and Oromo nationalism in south which is responsible for the death of thousands and displacement of millions Amharas.

Experience of suspicion due to an imagined allegation of Amhara as oppressor, the persistence of barriers to mobility along Ethiopian forces Amhara suffered under the Tigre dominated EPRDF government and the loss of Amharas' centre of adherence provides a common foundation that strengthens the sense of ethno national identity. What must be under scored, however, is they have not entirely rejected all the core themes in the established myth towards the state. A recent manifestation of this intensified ethnic consciousness is the rising preference for Ethiopian-Amhara rather than "Amhara-Ethiopian" and "Amhara" as a self-categorization. It was developed and lead by individuals who are far from government circle but later confiscated by those who are in a government position.

Confiscated Ethno Nationalism

Since 1991 a complex interaction has appeared between government and Amhara elite around the question of nationalism. The government tries to implement its ethnic based political projects and the elites mostly from Amhara were utterly opposed this and favor pan Ethiopian agendas. However, this has changed in later developments. Amhara nationalism stimulated by the elites far to government circles certainly by Amhara elites living abroad but with close collaboration of Amhara elites who are on board begun to penetrate the government circle.

Nearly in a same time the Amhara ethno nationalism begun to take off, the Amhara regional government came with an alternate "Democratic Nationalism", according to critics, for the obstruction of the Amhara's ethno national consciousness. Region's governing party ANDP⁷ knew that Amhara nationalism is a double-edged sword that could turn against the regional government as it did against the TPLF. Anger at the TPLF/EPRDF could lead to open criticism of ANDP's policy- which is unforgivably soft in the eyes of most Amhara nationalists- and could ignite a host of popular grievances about corruption, economic inequality, and other troubles. This has enforced

⁷ Amhara National Democratic Party

the party to shift its ideological orientation from “democratic nationalism” to the “ethnic nationalism” which is propagated by other Amhara political organizations. This episode shows how useful ethno nationalism is to the regional government both in order to legitimize its leadership over society and further its interests on the country.

The Amhara regional government realized that these will be getting out of control and could reduce its margin if they do not direct it. The regional government ceased an overt attempt to suppress ethno national movements first and tried to lead the movement next. Arch opposers of the movement in the government circle had confiscated and instrumentalised it. Having for twenty five years working close to TPLF as an agent in Amhara region ANDP try to nourish and support the ethno nationalist feelings of the people which are momentous development against their political partner in Tigray. The Amhara ethno national consciousness has gradually regained its place in government discourse, clearing the way for the expression among the intellectual elites. Today Amhara nationalism tends to be the litmus test for legitimacy of the regional government.

CONCLUSION

It is claimed that Amhara nationalism is rootless, not broad based and predicted as ephemeral. It is certain that the idea of Amhara national identity is not well-developed among groups in rural areas but it is well entrenched in the elite circle. Regardless of whatever degree of ethno national sentiment existed, it is clear that Amhara ethno centric consciousness has developed and cannot be disregarded. It has great power and intensity, as shown over the last four years by the demonstrations against the massacre and displacement of Amharas, denunciation of Amhara regional representatives over their less Amhara aspirations and its ambition to acquire Amhara lost territories in neighboring Tigray and Benishangul regions. As public opinion shifted, Pro Ethiopia Amhara politicians understandably attempted to portray themselves as ethno centric and tried to exploit existing development. Therefore, its existence cannot be denied.

The failure of the state to provide security to ethnic Amharas particularly in regions where they found to be minority created a favorable environment for ethno centric movements to flourish in Amhara region. The growing differentiation in wealth among regions; less or no sponsoring of wide Ethiopian nationalism by the current leading elite; and hyper and expansive ethno centrism in neighboring Tigray are among the factors for the current Amharas’ transition towards ethno centric orientations. Territorial annexation of Amhara lands from Gonder and Wollo to Tigray and exploitation, eviction and forceful assimilation of Amharic speaking peoples living in these territories had facilitated Amhara consciousness across the board. The ambition is to unify the Amhara people found in Amhara region with those their ethnic kins dispersed in neighboring regions such as Tigray/Welkaite and Raya and Benishangul/Metekel.

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