

Post-TPLF Ethiopia

Part II: Removing the Vestiges of the TPLF

By

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It is not enough to outlaw the TPLF as a terrorist organization; its core ideas and practices must be repudiated. Ethiopia cannot afford to have “**TPLFISM**” without the TPLF. The TPLF has adopted ethnicism, mixed with strands of other ideologies, as its core ideology to divide Ethiopians, to weaken Ethiopia, and to stifle democracy. If Ethiopia is to successfully maintain its national unity and to embark on a democratic trajectory under a strong federal government, it must reject ethnicism in all its forms.

All of Ethiopia’s myriad economic, political, and social problems emanate from ethnicism. Ethnicism, as I [have argued elsewhere](#), has produced ethnic political parties, ethnic politics, ethnic federalism, and an ethnically framed constitution.

Ethnicism has inflicted structural violence on the Ethiopian people. [Structural violence](#), according to sociologists, is the systemic harm inflicted on marginalized groups. Ethnicism produces marginalized ethnic groups.

It has been suggested that structural violence takes different forms: political, economic, and cultural. In Ethiopia, much of the political violence created by ethnicism has been legally sanctioned by the ethnically inspired constitution. [Article 8.1 reads](#), “*All sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia.*” Hence, the constitution creates two types of Ethiopians: indigenes who enjoy full rights (at least theoretically) and non-indigenes who lack basic political rights.

The Need for the De-ethnicization of Politics

In a multi-ethnic country like Ethiopia individual and collective rights must be protected. Under the TPLF-written constitution, however, there is no protection of minority rights. In Oromia, although non-Oromos can send their children to Amharic elementary schools for now, their right is not protected by the constitution of Oromia. It was a “gift” given by a former president of the region to non-Oromos that can be revoked any time. Officially, Amharas and other ethnic groups account for about 10% of Oromia’s population, yet there is not a single non-Oromo member in the regional parliament or who is a senior government official in Oromia.

The situation in the region of Benishangul-Gumuz is even more egregious. The region's constitution blatantly violates fundamental human rights and freedoms. [Article 2](#) of the state constitution states, "*Although there are other people who live in the region, the Killil belongs to the nation and nationalities of Berta, Gumuz, Shinaha, Mao, and Kamo*". (Translation, mine). The regional constitution, based on the federal constitution, disenfranchises more than 40% of the region's population.

Although the [Amharas](#) constitute the largest ethnic group in the region, they are not represented in the regional parliament, government, or the police force because the region's constitution openly denies them basic rights. With little or no institutional protection, the Amharas have become the target for ethnic cleansing and mass killings in the region, more so since the TPLF was removed from power.

Ethnicism engenders economic violence based on ethnicity. An individual may not get employed or promoted because of his/her ethnicity. An individual may not get the permit to start a business. An individual may face restricted access to credit, loans, land, permits, license, electricity, foreign exchange, water, and other services, simply because he or she belongs to the "wrong" ethnicity. The litany of ethnic-based discriminatory practices under ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is long. It should be removed and outlawed, just like its architect.

Ethnicism also generates in cultural violence. An entire ethnic group can be branded "the enemy" and be subjected to direct abuse and indirect systemic violence. The Amharas, who have been branded as "chauvinists", have borne much of the brunt of cultural violence generated by ethnicism in Ethiopia. They had been subjected to [daily indignation, micro aggression, humiliation, and direct physical](#) and psychological violence for more than three decades.

The TPLF leadership has normalized boorishness in political discourse. In political discussions, discourtesy is plenty, civility a rarity. Disrespect is perceived as a badge of strength, and politeness, a sign of weakness. Too many "red lines" are drawn, making it impossible to compromise and arrive at a consensus on issues. The recent adolescent comments by some Oromo politicians exemplifies the extent to which the culture of verbal violence has spread in Ethiopia.

The culture of violence, spawned, nurtured, and disseminated by the TPLF, has profoundly undermined moral standards. Following the examples of politicians, the youth have become verbally and physically violent. Politically motivated killings, using horrendous methods, have become too common. Who would have thought that Ethiopians would behead other human beings, no matter who their "enemy" is?

Just two decades ago, a reporter for the New York Times was impressed by how Ethiopians and Eritreans respectively [treated their prisoners of war with dignity](#). Today, the TPLF drives trucks over “captured” soldiers, [cuts the breasts of female](#) soldiers, or [slits their throats](#). Ethnicism has brought out the worst impulses in individuals.

The Need for Demilitarization

The TPLF’s long-term objective has been to stay in power for perpetuity by establishing its dynasty, either in Ethiopia or if that failed in an independent Tigray. To realize this objective, the TPLF has militarized Ethiopia, mentally and physically.

It smuggled large quantities of arms into Ethiopia. It [accumulated](#) heavy military equipment, often taking it from the ENDF. It [trained its “defense” forces](#)”, using retired military officers from the ENDF. It built [trenches and underground](#) bunkers. It chanted its war cries. When it thought that its military preparation was complete, it launched its assault on the Northern [Command on that fateful date of November 3](#).

As part of its military preparation, it created the regional special forces, but like so many of its decisions, it gave the other Killils an inch while taking a mile for itself. It had by far the best equipped and well-trained special forces, funded by the federal government.

The TPLF had two objectives in creating the special forces: First, to brutally suppress the opposition to its dictatorial rule, by outsourcing repression to the regional governments, as it did in the Somali region. Second, it hoped when it is time to divide Ethiopia into ethnic states, to create the Greater Tigray, the special forces will be busy killing each other while the TPLF consolidates its power to control the weak states under the new “ethnic confederation” it dreamt to establish.

Ironically, the special forces it created for the destruction of Ethiopia played crucial roles in preserving Ethiopia. The Amhara special forces successfully defended the TPLF’s assault on the Amhara region and was instrumental in the TPLF’s defeat. The Somali special forces successfully stopped the infiltration of Al Shabab into Ethiopia. The Afar special forces patrolled the border between Tigray and Afar, preventing the TPLF leaders from escaping, and the Oromia special forces appear to be winning the war against the armed wing of the OLF.

Although the special forces have played an important role in defeating the TPLF, there is no justification for their existence. They should be disbanded and incorporated into a multi-ethnic, well trained, well-disciplined federal police force. The regional special forces, as has been pointed out by many, are illegal entities with no provision for their existence under the constitution. They have no role in a strong democratic federal state.

Similarly, the government should encourage Ethiopians to hand in their arms, discourage war mongering, and promote civility in political discourse, starting with its own officials. Officials, it appears, need instructional training in civility. Every effort should be made to reduce, temper, and eliminate the culture of violence that has been practiced over the last three decades and to enhance a culture of peace, tolerance, and understanding. Demilitarization, physically and mentally, is essential to have peace in Ethiopia.

The repudiation of the ethnicism facilitates writing a new constitution, establishing democratic federalism, outlawing ethnic parties, separating the state and the party, forbidding political parties from owning their own media outlets, prohibiting political parties from owning businesses, and introducing other measures that will enhance unity, equality, and freedom in Ethiopia.

The Unity of Ethiopians

It only took less than three weeks to control Mekele, with less destruction and fewer civilian casualties than was expected. This victory will no doubt go down in the annals of military history as one of the most brilliantly executed wars against what was consistently described as a *“large, well-armed, well-trained, and battle-hardened army”*. The TPLF was outmaneuvered by the leadership of ENDF, three of whom were called back to duty after having been forced to retire early because of their ethnicity. They delivered victory. The TPLF’s myth of invincibility that it used to boast so much about has been shattered for all the world to see.

The TPLF sought to split the army, but its cowardly ambush in the middle of the night on the Northern Command and its barbaric treatment of the officers and soldiers bonded the army more than ever. It hoped to divide Ethiopia along ethnic lines, but its cruel assault on the ENDF united Ethiopians across ethnic lines. It intended to undermine the Prime Minister, but its defeat raised his popularity. Seldom in history has such a political and military blunder been committed by a political actor as the TPLF leadership has done in its ill-fated decision to attack the Northern Command.

The post-TPLF Ethiopia should cast away the legacy of the TPLF. The TPLF’s relics belong to the waste basket of history. Hundreds, possibly thousands of soldiers and civilians, sacrificed their lives in defeating the TPLF. In outlawing the TPLF, repudiating ethnicism, and strengthening national unity based on equality, freedom, and justice for all, Ethiopia will honour its heroes. The old Ethiopia, the fragmented, factorized, and fractured Ethiopia served the narrow interests of the TPLF leadership. The new Ethiopia—the strong, united, and democratic Ethiopia—must serve the democratic will of all Ethiopians.

Ethiopia has learnt its harshest lessons from the TPLF's three decades of ethnicist dictatorship. The armed conflict has brought to light the viciousness of ethnicism. Never again should **"TPLFISM"** be tolerated in Ethiopia.

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