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This article is republished in partnership with Ethiopia InsightIn Ethiopia's ever-changing political landscape, one recent phenomenon has been the emergence of Amhara nationalism. Compared to other substate nationalisms, namely, Oromo, Tigrayan, Somali and Sidama, it's a latecomer.



They have to pay for it now in lost jobs and positions for their hateful identification to a past now seen as distasteful to the military junta. "Such policies increased after the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democrotic Front seized power in 1991. The dominant segment, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, had identified the Amhara as its "eternal enemy" at the start of its armed struggle, and after 1991 turned this party manifesto into government policy, implementing it in earnest, using state structures and instruments of violence. READ MORE Politics: Solving Ethiopia's fractured ethnic puzzleAmhara people were subject to forced disappearance, displacement, arbitrary killings and humiliation. Building on Derg's accusation of past Amhara privilege, TPLF worked to depict Amhara as the "outlaws", "oppressors", and "enemies" of other "nations and nationalities" to successfully marginalize and exclude them from the economic windfalls of political power. Now, by any objective standard, an average farmer in Amhara region stands at least as poor as an average farmer in any of the other allegedly oppressed regions. The birth of Amhara nationalismThe sustained policy of oppression gradually sowed the seeds of victimhood, alienation, discrimination, and a resentment which finally inspired Amhara nationalism. Its origin dates back to the early 1990s, but it only took its current shape two years ago with the establishment of the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA). Ironically, TPLF and Oromo ethno-nationalist forces welcomed this development, with many proclaiming success in longstanding efforts to force "Amharas to embrace their Amharaness"; the latter saw it as the dawn of a new political scene allowing for renegotiation of the existing federation. Others, concerned by the dangers of ethnic nationalism, expressed their fear that this would intensify an already polarized political climate and lead to disintegration. While Amhara nationalism has had an impact on the political consciousness of the youth and articulated common interests, it is still characterised by a lack of ideological clarity, and a dependable institutional bulwark, a cohesive social base or even, as opposition politician Yilikal Getinet has pointed out, a centre of gravity. READ MORE Abiy Ahmed must learn from the failed Ethio-Eritrean federationSome of these problems arise from the size of Amhara population and the Amhara region's diverse ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic composition, making collective action a real and unavoidable problem. Historically, public consciousness has been based on sub-regions, (Gojjam, Gondar, Shewa, or Wollo), or even smaller zones or districts. tekojusovihete Anything larger has been Ethiopian national identity. Amhara identity, in its current form, is a recent introduction and forced self-appropriation, caused by an existential threat and alienation. The younger generation has adopted its 'Amharaness'; but most ordinary people are yet to fully embrace it, not least because of the lack of any effectively articulated ideological foundation or priorities and the absence of any 'tailor-made' solutions to the challenges facing them. Congenital problemsUnfortunately, Ethiopia's population seem not to have reached the stage where individual merit receive higher premium than membership to a particular group. This has made nationalism a very potent weapon to claim and secure political and economic power. Tarnishing Amhara nationalism is therefore hypocritical as well as counterproductive. Rather, it needs to develop to withstand competing forces and preserve the interests of Amhara people in national political disputes. This will enable Amhara people to play their role in building a new Ethiopia founded on rule of law, equality and freedom. The makers and breakers of Amhara nationalism should thus come out of the delusion of self-efficacy and (re)consider its content and future trajectory. Jean-Jacques Rousseau said "...every people has, or must have, a [national] character, if it lacks one, we must start by endowing it one". Most nationalist movements in one way or the other follow the same logic, but one of the congenital defects of Amhara nationalism has been its attempt to replicate the 50-year-old Tigrayan or Oromo nationalism model and a failure to pave its own road, one that reflects the realities of the Amhara people and Amhara region. The latter two movements are 'mature', in terms of endowing their people a national character, shaped by a nationalist psyche, founded on a too readily accepted sense of victimhood and politics of resentment. This has made their respective constituencies view their circumstances as the fault of others, not the product of broad historical social, economic, and political forces. In contrast, let alone Amhara nationalism, as indicated, Amhara identity is only a recent occurrence to many Amhara people. While the region is also home to various other micro-nations, its people are also spread across the whole of Ethiopia. Amharic being a widely spoken language, the Amhara, unlike Oromo and Tigrayans, also do not have their own media that, in the words of Carol Skalnik Leff, "[is] insulated by language barriers from alternative viewpoints" allowing them to maintain a private "segregated intellectual universe". The failure of Amhara nationalism to acknowledge these and other strategic vulnerabilities means its actors have often appeared oblivious to their own aims. One intrinsic marker of many nationalist movements is the willingness to sacrifice private desires for the greater collective interest. 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Our knowledge, understanding, education and choice of ways to deal with the problems of the Amhara people may differ but there is no evidence to show that their loyalty or love to their people is less than our own. yegtebihgozu We can question their competence but we should not deny that they are brothers sprung from the same family. A mourner holds the photo of Amhara president Ambachew Mekonnen during a funeral ceremony in the town of Bahir Dar, Amhara region, Ethiopia June 26, 2019. Picture taken June 26, 2019. gokefotemi REUTERS/Baz Ratner To match Insight ETHIOPIA-SECURITY/ATTACKS - RC190E185930Nationalist ideology is often driven by sinisterly construed and caricatured 'facts' and engineered 'truths'. Amhara nationalism also, in its bid to beat the record of Oromo and Tigrayan nationalisms, is sometimes seen as reluctant to accept conspicuous truths. It is often tend to rely more on demagoguery, conspiracy theory and self-serving conjecture, in a rather similar fashion to Ethiopia's general political culture, where facts are often deliberately ignored, ridiculed or dismissed. Suggestions to rebuild it on knowledge rather than visceral emotions are consistently rejected, as inappropriate attempts to be rational in an irrational world. jathibapiku This has emboldened the incapable and uplifted the most ignorant by deterring most erudite Amharas from supporting it. As a result, Amhara nationalism still lacks widespread elite consensus or critical elite mass support. Amhara nationalism also inherited another defining feature of Ethiopian politics: adoption of suspicion towards compatriots holding dissenting opinions. The result has been greater engagement in fault-finding and accusations than finding a common ground. Yet, it is hardly possible for Amhara nationalism to achieve its desired objective if the motive of all individuals holding opposing views is constantly questioned. Differences are natural, even in a family, and they will always exist. What matters most is not their existence but the way we approach and deal with them. Path to redemptionUnderstanding the problems of the current state of Amhara nationalism is crucial to finding solutions, and here are some general directions which I think will not only help rectify the serious constraints of the movement but also improve the political culture of Amhara region and beyond. For Amhara nationalism to make a meaningful contribution, it needs to clearly set out its main objectives and have a proper ideological fulcrum. Its ideologies should articulate the interests of the Amhara people, identify structural threats, ideologies or groups friendly or inimical to those interests and flesh out different means of countering them both in the short- and long-term. For example, the country's constitution, the existing federal system, which gives ownership over specific regions while making Amharas strangers in their own country; some political groups seeking to eliminate Amhara and anything Amhara under the pretext of 'multinational federalism', etc. pose structural, legal and survival challenges to Amharas. These are complex problems that require Amharas to design sober-headed strategies beyond recurring emotional reactions to the problems' frequent manifestations and occurrences. In this context, it is crucial that Amhara nationalism is alive to the strategic vulnerabilities of the Amhara people in the larger Ethiopian polity and the specific realities of Amhara region; it should be pragmatic and its modes of engagement customized. Amhara's psyche, realities and threats are different from those of other groups. Victimhood may be a common sprouting ground for most nationalist movements, but an alternative foundation anchored in pride and collective self-esteem is also available. In this regard, the Amhara people have a long history of independence, state culture and government, amazing and colourful traditions, civilization and wonderful societal values such as kindness and honesty, gallant spirit and fear of God. nonayahudisopo Amhara nationalism should cultivate and exploit these. Amhara nationalism should thus be revisited and rebuilt on pride, popular self-esteem and the myths of love rather than hatred and resentment. 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For this, we should remember that our common destiny is inextricably intertwined; while legitimately challenging them, we should accept that those fellow-Amhara in positions of power are our own brothers and no matter how we want to disregard them, they are our given facts and we should find a common ground to work with them. We need to be open for diversity of ideas and compromise, multiculturalism, and, at all times, appreciate and act upon facts. Our suspicious tendency towards differing views should not allow us to reject obvious truths or good ideas. In the fight against ideological and existential enemies, we should arm ourselves with weapons of clarity of thought and perseverance. Amhara nationalism should further fight against politics of reaction. In an environment characterised by competing nationalisms, agendas are fabricated and regularly disseminated in efforts to achieve narrative dominance. Amhara nationalism should neither fall into the trap of agenda-setting of others nor should it be an ideology of reaction. No matter what opponents say, Amhara nationalists should always control their actions, knowing what and when to say and act. READ MORE Ethiopia's political crisis is playing out in the regions The best way to preserve the interests of the Amhara people is not to engage in politics of reaction but in 'best-modelling' of oneself. If Amhara elites can join hands in developing their region, they can set up themselves and their region as an example of prosperity, and an avatar of democracy and multiculturalism and will be able to positively influence the future path of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. We should promote democracy at the local level, modernize government institutions and transform our economy, education and societal culture. The future is a world of communication and innovation.

As such, we should establish academic institutions which offer innovative solutions to our chronic problems and produce a generation of polyglots who speak multiple foreign and local languages—soft weapons, more potent than AK-47s, but effective in preserving the long-term interests of Amhara people. This must go along with a proper 'selling' strategy.

So far, we have failed in this regard badly. Amhara people are often accused of being 'assimilationist' and 'anti-federalism/multiculturalism'. In fact, however, no other region in Ethiopia than Amhara the regional state more fully respects multiculturalism or federalism and the right to self-administration of ethnic minorities. [yifabutapuzoku](#) This is a fact and should be systematically and persistently used to counter those sinister and false accusations. Finally, one of George Orwell's most scathing criticism against nationalism was: "There is no crime that cannot be condoned when our side commits it." This should never have any place in Amhara region or among Amharas. What is wrong is wrong. It should be condemned at all times, regardless of who does it or against whom it is done. [cefiwupulokiwe](#) Anchoring Amhara nationalism in the ideals of what is correct, just and proper—rejecting resentment, victimhood and wrong conduct—is the only thing that matches the popular psyche and collective soul of the Amhara people. Anything less will not only be injudicious, but also self-destructive. We believe that Africa is poorly represented, and badly under-estimated. [ribidowo](#) Beyond the vast opportunity manifest in African markets, we highlight people who make a difference; leaders turning the tide, youth driving change, and an indefatigable business community. That is what we believe will change the continent, and that is what we report on. [hibo](#) With hard-hitting investigations, innovative analysis and deep dives into countries and sectors, The Africa Report delivers the insight you need.

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