



Amhara Annexation of Western Tigray



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Tigray Genocide and Amhara Expansionism

On November 4, 2020, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched a genocidal war against Tigray under the cover of a “law-enforcement-operation.” Since then, Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Eritrean forces, and Amhara militias have committed grave human rights violations and war crimes against the people of Tigray.

One reason Amhara forces joined the war was in hopes of claiming Tigrayan lands. Amhara officials’ attempt to annex Tigray’s most fertile land is intended to weaken Tigray’s economic and political independence.

For instance, Western Tigray and Kafta Humera woreda are the sources for one of Tigray’s largest exports, sesame. Before the war, Tigray produced a third of Ethiopia's sesame exports, worth almost \$350 million a year.

By allowing the Amhara region to take part in the genocidal war on Tigray, Abiy has gained the support of Amhara nationalists who aim to unite Ethiopia under Amhara rule.

History of Western Tigray: Pre-Menelik II

Those who are justifying the current Amhara annexation of Western Tigray claim that land west and south of the Tekeze River belongs to Amhara. **However, the currently disputed land has historically belonged to Tigray.**

II. TIGRE.	
1. Tigré Proper	7. Avergalé.
2. Agamé.	8. Samen.
3. Enderta.	9. Temben.
4. Wojjerat, or Wogara.	10. Siré, or Shiré.
5. Wofila.	11. Walkayt.
6. Lasta.	12. Waldubba.

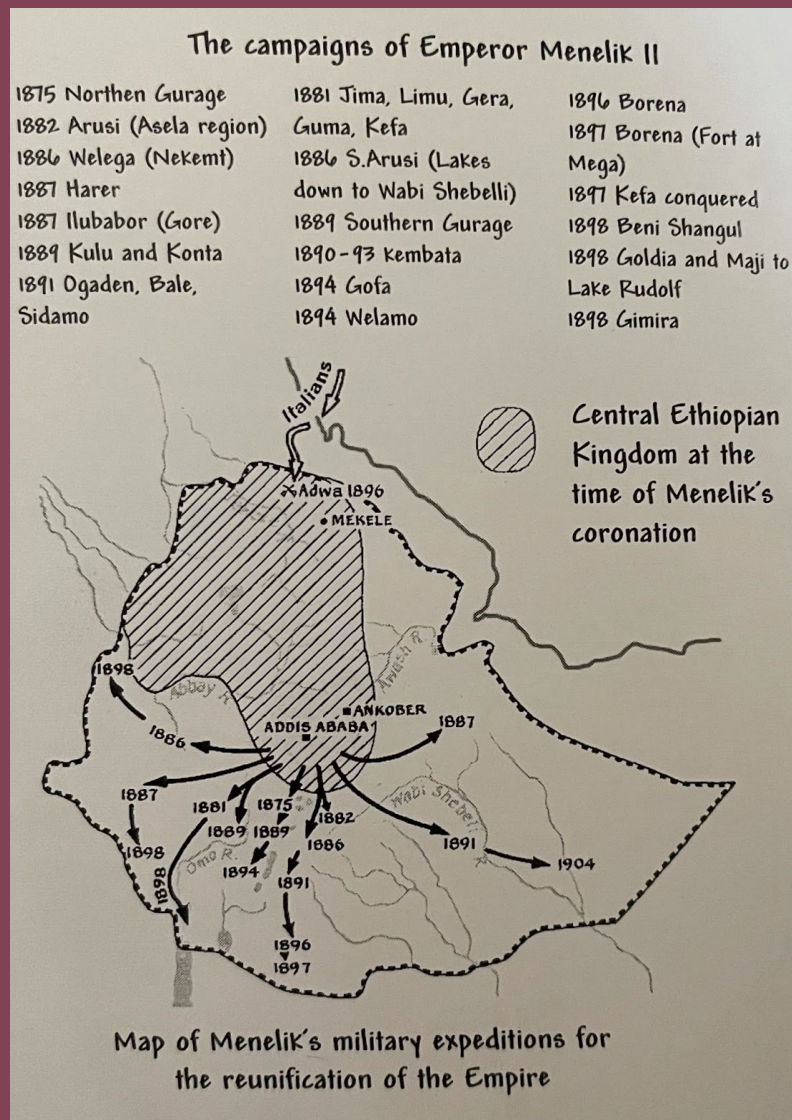
Published 1854, Nubia and Abyssinya

Areas such as Wolkait, Lasta (north-central Ethiopia, currently Amhara), Samen (Simien Mountain area, currently Amhara), Humera, Tsegede, and Tselemti in Western Tigray in addition to areas like Raya in Southern Tigray were under Tigrayan governance and Tigrigna was the dominant language of the region prior to Menelik II's rule.

This territorial history is illustrated by the names of many towns in these areas. These towns have Tigrayan names, such as Ketema Nigus, Addi Remets, and Enda Abaguna.



History of Western Tigray: Emperor Menelik II



Land annexation of Western Tigray is not a new phenomenon and has been used in the past by rulers as a strategy to weaken Tigray.

Emperor Menelik II was king of Shewa (1886-1889) before becoming emperor of Ethiopia (1889-1913). Menelik II expanded the kingdom and would frequently violently invade and acquire land in order to consolidate Amhara rule over other ethnic groups.

Emperor Menelik II viewed Tigray as a threat to his empire because of Tigray's history of self-governance and autonomy. As a result, to suppress Tigrayan rivals he reduced the size of Tigray and wanted to incorporate parts of Tigray into Amharic-speaking regions.

Emperor Menelik II used Tigrayan land as a bargaining tool with the Italians. He signed the Treaties of Wuchale and Feres Mai in 1889, which gave Italy northern Tigrayan territories in exchange for money and weapons. The areas given away included Hamasien, Sheketi, Segeneyti, and eventually up to Mereb.

Emperor Menelik II also incorporated parts of Western Tigray, including **Wolkait and Tsegede**, into Amharic-speaking Begemder (currently Gonder, Amhara) even though most of the population was Tigrayan.

History of Western Tigray: Emperor Haile Selassie

During his rule (1930 - 1974), Emperor Haile Selassie continued to give away Tigrayan land to Amharic-speaking regions. In 1943, Tigrayans rebelled against the imperial regime of Haile Selassie when he wanted to further centralize the government which would remove Tigray's right to self-determination. This movement is known as the First Woyane (Kedamay Woyane).



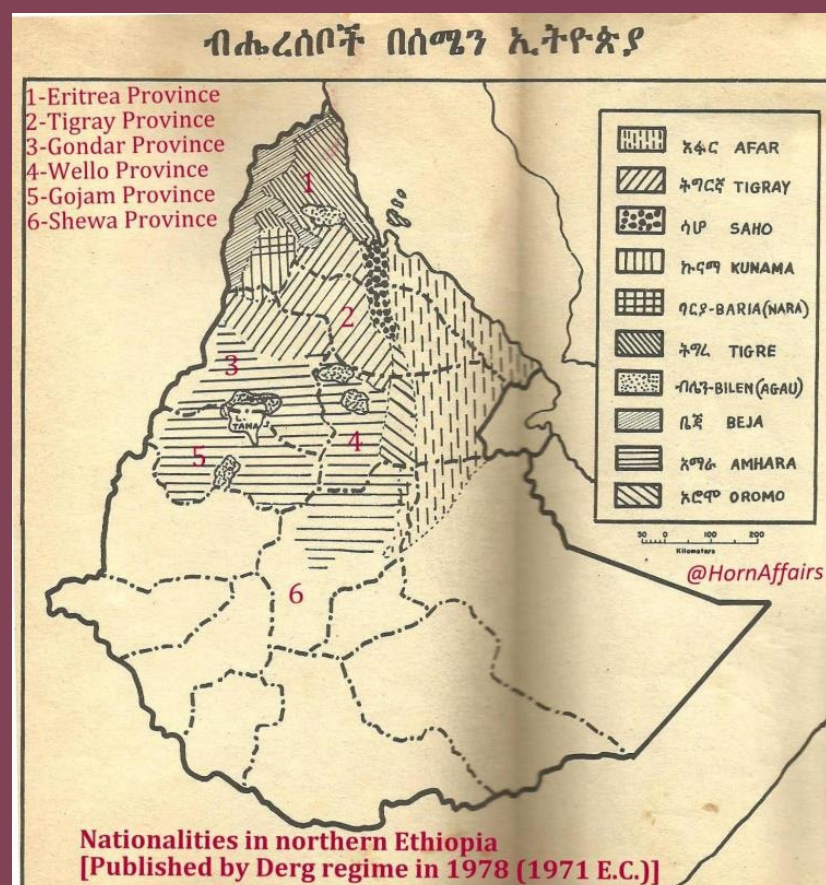
1963 map of Ethiopia

To suppress the movement, Haile Selassie violently bombed Tigray with the help of the United Kingdom's Royal Air Force in October 1943. After the First Woyane was defeated, Haile Selassie annexed Southern Tigray to Amharic-speaking provinces to weaken and punish Tigrayans, while also maintaining and institutionalizing the annexation of Western Tigray done by Menelik II.

Return of parts of Western Tigray to Tigray 1991

In 1974, the Derg military regime overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie. In 1975, the Second Woyane was born when the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) revolted against the repressive Derg and significantly contributed to the overthrow of the regime in 1991.

Leading the movements that overthrew the Derg, the TPLF led the formation of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which was a multinational federalist coalition composed of four political parties. The EPRDF was grounded in the idea that each ethnic group had a right to self-determination. Therefore, the regional states' territories were divided ethno-linguistically.



As a result, parts of Tigrayan land which had been previously annexed to Amharic-speaking regions, such as Wollo and Begemder by Menelik II and Haile Selassie, were returned to Tigray.

According to the 1994 Ethiopian Census, contested land of Western Tigray, such as Tsegede, Wolkait, Humera, and Tselemti, were inhabited mostly by Tigrayans, and Tigrigna was spoken by most of the population. Such findings in addition to the land's history gave credence to the new borders reinstated by the EPRDF's ethnic-based restructuring.

Western Tigray Land Annexation during the Genocidal War in Tigray

Abiy Ahmed is currently using the same land grabbing strategies employed by Menelik II and Haile Selassie to weaken Tigray, ethnically homogenize the region, and erase the Tigrayan identity with the support of Amhara nationalists.



Abiy allowed the violent reincorporation of Wolkait, Tsegede, Humera, and Tselemti in Western Tigray. Western Tigray is now illegally under the control of the Amhara regional government.

Tigrayans have been forcefully removed from parts of Western Tigray and are now internally displaced persons. Tigrayans have been told by Amhara forces that if they stay in Western Tigray they will be killed. Amhara militias have looted and burned Western Tigrayan homes, farms, and livestock.

Many Tigrayan houses have been vandalized by Amhara militias with phrases written in Amharic such as “Amhara house” or “This is ours.” Buildings in Northwestern Tigray have also been vandalized with explicit Tigrayan hate speech.

Amhara settlers also have been transported in minibuses with their household goods to occupy Western Tigray. Amhara representatives plan to resettle half a million Amharas in Western Tigray.

Western Tigray Land Annexation during the Genocidal War in Tigray

In May 2021, the Amhara regional government invited investors to lease farms in Western Tigray. In the published list of names, almost all **288 farms were owned by Tigrayans**. The Amhara government also allowed investors to purchase the land with only proof of identification to speed up the process of giving away Tigrayan land.

The Amhara regional flag has also been erected in areas such as Wolkait, Tsegede, and Tselemti. In addition, billboards have been put up in towns throughout Western Tigray that claim that these areas are now part of the Amhara State.

Since the unilateral ceasefire on June 28th, new Amhara recruits have been mobilizing to Western Tigray. These efforts also correspond with statements from Agegnehu Teshager, the Amhara governor, claiming that the Amhara state is preparing for war with Tigray.

Ethnic Cleansing of Western Tigray

Amhara expansionism goes beyond the current land annexation of Western Tigray, but also includes the horrific ethnic cleansing in the area. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted in March 2021 that acts of ethnic cleansing were occurring in Western Tigray.

Amhara authorities have ***burned Tigrayan ID cards and reissued citizens with Amhara identity cards***. Authorities have also told Tigrayans that they could only speak Amharic.

Amhara militias have ***extrajudicially killed Tigrayans, and have prevented families from burying the bodies of their loved ones*** because they are Tigrayan.

Tigrayan women have been raped by Amhara militia members to “Amharize” the women and change their Tigrayan identity.

Access to Western Tigray has been severely impeded by Amhara militiamen. This has made it incredibly difficult to send aid and food to the region.

The actions of the Ethiopian government in collaboration with Amhara forces clearly demonstrate their intent to occupy and ethnically cleanse Western Tigray, and consolidate power through any means necessary.

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