

# **The “Welqait Question”: Is it about Democracy, about Patriotism, or about Business?**

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## **Part I “The “Welqait Question””**

On April 15, 2022 a certain Wassy Tesfa referred to Welqait as “the red line that cannot be crossed in Ethiopia” in her post on Borkena.com. As a childcare expert she is understandably oblivious to the charged political explosive that was sitting squarely on her palm. She is not alone; no one is as absolutely certain as the naïve Amhara elite are that they are the most enlightened and hold the undisputed truth about the matter. This is the reason why regional presidents of the Amhara Region and lay people alike abundantly use such threatening hyperboles. Amidst the noise and spontaneous violence of Welqait as a rallying cry all those involved have utterly failed to realize that the “Welqait Question” is neither logically articulated nor is it supported by political maturity of its proponents. Emotions are triggered like a nuclear chain reaction and no one seems to be able to stop them.

A casual look at the list of those who claim to be vanguards of the “Welqait Question” reveals that most are trigger happy former bandits, less educated but disgruntled army and police officers, countless activists and the media on federal and/or regional payrolls, filthy rich businessmen who are salivating for the fertile lands of Western Tigray, political charlatans who may have some aborted political science degrees or some other remotely related academic backgrounds, and the enablers of madness in the pariah state of Eritrea. There is little communication, except for intoxicating propaganda, between the movers and the moved. Thousands of brainwashed ordinary citizens are sent to their deaths without the slightest idea about the truth why they found themselves in this unfortunate situation.

As the “Welqait Question” has been elevated almost to the level of a national agenda it is not clear whether the question is about democracy, about Ethiopian patriotism, or about business. Different people, even in many cases the same people, may give different reasons for why “Welqait Question” has become “the master key to the very existence of Ethiopia”. Admission criterion to write on the sensitive Welqait issue seems to be absent. Well-experienced physician, assistant professor of clinical

medicine, and a technology executive in industry got the courage to write analytical articles on Welqait a subject matter even the geopolitical angels fear to tread. Wosenyelew Tedla and Moges Kelklie did not hesitate even for a second to state that: *“Welqait has always been one of the most strategic geopolitical hotspots in Ethiopia; more recently, it has become the defining point for the Amhara people, whose identity was erased from the area, and with it, Ethiopia’s territorial integrity.”* I really envy the bold-faced two. When I write commentary or analysis on such highly debatable issues I am stressed beyond limits fearing that I may be dwarfed by academic giants in the field.

In an Amharic language post on August 9, 2022, on **TOPZENA1** the British citizen of Ethiopian origin-Andargachew Tsegie- is quoted to have said the following: *“Ethiopia will disintegrate if Welqait is retaken by Woyane”* (translation). There are several fallacies in this carelessly thrown out statement from an arch opportunist and a mad genocide preacher. This statement irresponsibly equates the “Welqait Question” with the very existence of Ethiopia. This would mean since Ethiopia is glued together by Welqait, when the latter is missing then the former would turn into a heap of rubble. The unbridled statement of the close confidant of the Prime Minister draws analogy of Welqait as cement and Ethiopia as a building. In the last four years hundreds of people, in all walks of life, have become so loose-tongued that they have gone out of control without any one in their ranks to put sense into their heads. They are at a liberty to turn mole hills into mountains. I can assure you not many of the people from the one hundred million strong demography of Ethiopia know about what and where Welqait is, let alone consider it as a mortar holding Ethiopia together.

Another fallacy is about how Welqait would go missing. Ethiopia would lack the glue to hold it together if Welqait is missing does not mean the latter flies out into outer space. By missing they mean recaptured by Woyane. If Woyane retakes Welqait it is assumed that it leaves Ethiopia for good. If for the sake of convenience of the argument we consider Welqait as a mortar that holds Ethiopia together, the statement is tantamount to saying that Tigray is not a part of Ethiopia. However, the meaning is not as straight forward as it is implied here. For the sake of political correctness, although they like it inside their hearts, they don’t say bluntly that Tigray is a not a part of Ethiopia. They run a bizarre hypothesis that if Tigray gets Welqait back it will declare independence from Ethiopia; and the domino effect

would disintegrate Ethiopia. Since people hate to see Ethiopia disintegrate following an independence of Tigray they make sure that millions of patriotic citizens will follow them in their bloody war to keep Welqait in their possession. Thousands will die hoping that they are saving Ethiopia, but in vain, only to help the Amhara business elite and their foreign partners to invest heavily in Welqait. Their sacrifices will be forgotten and left to the broken families to bear the heavy burden of making a living without the bread winners.

To make believe their hypothesis that Tigray will declare independence as soon as it retakes Welqait they engage in massive propaganda campaign to prove to the people of Ethiopia that Tigray really plans to be independent. They put independence on the lips of Tigray and lie to the people that so and so said this and that. The most boring accusation leveled against Tigray about its “declared intention” to be independent from Ethiopia is the founding programme of the TPLF. The programme did not last a year after second thoughts; and contrary to the allegations TPLF united Ethiopia for thirty prosperous and peaceful years. There are hundreds who declare independence on “behalf” of Tigray where Tigray never uttered a single word about a plan to declare independence. The lady mayor of Addis Ababa seemed to care little about her public statement in front of a huge gathering when she recommended article 39 for Tigray. She was suggesting “a peaceful alternative” to war and the disintegration of Ethiopia to the Tigray leaders! It was dumbfounding that few reacted disapprovingly to her irresponsible but intentionally designed statement.

Sonja John, who was teaching at Gondar and Bahir Dar Universities had plunged herself into Welqait politics and published an “academic” article in the Journal of Asian and African Studies last year. I don’t blame her; she was understandably making a living in the lions’ den of the academic enablers of the quest for land for the Amhara economic elite. Her article entitled-“The Potential of Democratization in Ethiopia-The Welqait Question as a Litmus Test”- was another evidence how much the deceptive centrality thesis of Welqait has spread among non-Ethiopian supporters of the business wolves in political sheep-skin. For Sonja John, The Welqait Question is a litmus test for the success of democratization in Ethiopia. It is not only the survival of Ethiopia that depends on Welqait remaining in the hands of Amhara elite but also the fate of democracy in Ethiopia. The article targeted Abiy Ahmed expecting him to award Welqait to the Amhara if his democratization effort for Ethiopia is to be considered a success story. Sonja John was clearly acting as an

emissary for the “Welqait Amhara Identity Committee” to the Prime Minister. She got a point; unfortunately expatriates are better heard in Ethiopia. The Committee was playing its lobby card well. It hired a white foreigner to enchant Abiy Ahmed and the duplicates around him. Little wonder, strongly backed and generously financed as it is by the Amhara business elite it can jump easily into any hard politics.

Putting aside the far-fetched “centrality” of Welqait for the success of democratization in Ethiopia the democratization of Welqait can be spotlighted. Sonja John reports that the identity question of the indigenous Welqait Amhara was raised and suppressed since 1991. This is the question of democracy inside Welqait. When in April 2018 Abiy Ahmed met with members of the “Welqait Amhara Identity Question Committee” he promised that the case would be solved within the federal system and in accordance with the constitution. The demand for democracy for ethnic minorities within the larger ethnic majority is a question of justice. The context within which he suggested the issue needs to be resolved is also appropriate. As it is discussed thoroughly with evidence in Part II of this article Welqait before the war was/is overwhelmingly Tigrayan. Adjacent as it is to the Amharic speaking Gondar the existence of native Amharic speaking minority is not for debate. They are found in separate spatial clusters and/or mixed within the Tigrayan mainstream.

As it happens in the Oromia Region and in other regional states, ethnic minorities may be disadvantaged in terms of the medium of instruction and even in matters pertaining to elections. Protecting the rights of ethnic minorities in Tigray is the responsibility of the Regional Government. The experiences in the protection of minorities like Erob and Kunama can come in handy for application in Western Tigray and in Southern Tigray as well. Unfortunately, the goal of the “Welqait Question” is more sinister than it appears posing as a struggle for internal democracy in Tigray. Rather than peacefully and legally resolving the matter with the Tigray Regional Government as per the provisions of the Constitution the “Welqait Question” is blown beyond proportions and has become a rallying cry for the anti-Tigray campaign at home and in the diaspora. Civilian and armed groups in the Amhara Region and in the rest of Ethiopia have become hands-in-gloves with the “Welqait Amhara Identity Committee” and are fanning an oversized agenda in close collaboration with a foreign armed force: Eritrea.

The “Welqait Question” has been undemocratic from the outset. The leaders of the movement were jailed and inconvenienced because the Tigray Regional Government knew exactly what their real intentions concealed in the call for democracy in Welqait were. They wanted to remove Welqait from Tigray Region and join it with Northern Gondar Zone. Think of a minority Amhara forcing the Majority Tigrayans to come under the Amhara Regional administration or leave Welqait. This is too much to take as a “call for democratic rights” for the Ethnic minority. When Tigray was invaded the real face of the “Welqait Question” was unveiled and the “call for democracy” for Welqait Amhara turned into unbelievable monstrosity over a million Tigrayans in Western Tigray. Human Rights Watch in its 2022 report entitled “We Will Erase You from This Land” published the results of its investigation into the crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia’s Western Tigray Zone:

*“Since November 2020 where civilian authorities, and Amhara regional security forces, with the acquiescence and possible participation of Ethiopian federal forces, committed numerous grave abuses as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Tigrayan civilian population that amount to crimes against humanity as well as war crimes. These crimes include murder, enforced disappearances, torture, deportation or forcible transfer, rape, sexual slavery and other sexual violence, persecution, unlawful imprisonment, possible extermination, and other inhumane acts”.*

The “Welqait Question” is not a unifying issue for the Amhara. Upon closer scrutiny one can easily uncover underlying the “Welqait Question” is a “Gondar Question”. The starting point can be the fact that the “Raya Question” is demoted to second or third rate. Although Tigray is accused of annexing Raya (Southern Tigray) and Welqait (Western Tigray) the former is paid little attention to. It seems to have been left to the Welloyes to fret about. While Welqait is over inflated as a “life and death issue” for Amhara, few strongly advocate the “Raya Question” as an Amhara Question. The neglect is aggravated by the grudges the Gonderes bear on the Welloyes for “allowing” the Woyane across Wello in the second half of 2021 on its way to Addis Ababa. Welloyes were downgraded as “not Amhara enough”. The Oromo-mix of the Welloyes has always been a reason for the Gonderes who pride themselves with ethnic “purity” to belittle the Welloyes as suffering from “identity crisis”. It was probably for this reason that the Wello group of the Fanno irregulars were single handed in their incursions into Raya.

Except for the collaboration expected of them as Amhara Shewans to support the rest of the Amhara zones, they are least interested to lay down their lives in distant lands of Raya and Welqait, which are of little potential value to them. Shewa Amhara is historically and geopolitically south and east oriented. Its outlet to the sea has been the Addis Ababa-Djibouti line. Besides its orientation towards central Ethiopia for its domestic and external trade Gojjam has its own axe to grind in neighboring Metekel (Benishangul Gumz Region); Welqait is in a too far away land to long for. When the “Welqait Question” was launched it was a matter for the Gonderes. According to Sonja John, *“On 23 August 2015...conducted an inaugural conference in Gondar with approximately 450 Welqait Amhara in attendance.”* In light of such a parochial beginning and who has been running the show for so long the “Welqait Question” is a jaggy chunk to swallow as an “Amhara Question”.

What do the Gonderes want in Welqait? The bottom line is that the business interest that is driving political action has multiple facets. Corresponding with the “Gondar Question” in Welqait is the “Eritrea Question”. The ports that are used by land locked Ethiopia are too far for Gondar. Next to Tigray, Gondar is the most distant corner of Ethiopia for access the Djibouti Port. So what is driving Gonderes into the crazy scheme is geopolitical consideration. The closest option for the growing wealth of Gondere business investing in Gondar is the Eritrean port of Massawa. Using Port Sudan for Gondar external trade would mean travelling across hostile territory. Unfortunately for the Gonderes Tigray lies between Gondar and Eritrea blocking free access for Gondar to Massawa port. Historically, Gonderes used the Gondar-Shire-Adwa-Asmara highway for imports and exports. The route across Setit and Gash Barka did not need crossing Tigray to access Massawa. However, the hot semi-arid lowlands were not preferred by Gonderes. That was the Imperial Era in which Gondar was more privileged in the eyes of the center than Tigray was. Tigray in no way could levy taxes on goods to and fro Gondar.

The Federal system and its corollary and the self-rule in the Tigray Regional State demotivated Gonder. In fact, Eritrea became independent cancelling the need to cross Tigray to access the port of Massawa. The incorporation of Welqait, Tsegede and Humera into the Tigray Region completely sealed direct access from Gondar to Eritrea. Between Eritrea which wants to access the bountiful market of northwestern Ethiopia for the products from Eritrea and the export of agricultural commodities to Eritrea from Gondar became a huge multi-billion business hard to resist. So the idea

of retaking Welqait and Humera by Gondar and sharing it with Eritrean and probably UAE businesses was conceived. What remained was “belling the cat”: disabling Tigray. When the going got tough for the allied forces to completely weaken and render Tigray subservient their actions became more desperate and deteriorated into committing massive genocide.

To cut a long story short now peace deal has been signed between the Ethiopian Federal Government and Tigray to the dissatisfaction of the Gonderes and Eritreans who are now exposed as the prime motivators of the two year Tigray war. We now know who the real culprit has been. The “struggle for civil rights of the Amhara minority in Western Tigray” was just a sham. Something is suspicious here. Why did it take so long until 2015 to raise a “civil right issue” in Welqait? Does it mean the human rights issue in Western Tigray surfaced sixteen years after the new administrative map of Ethiopia was introduced? These rogue elements have a lot of explaining to do for the widespread human right abuses and crimes against humanity in Western Tigray against Tegarú civilians

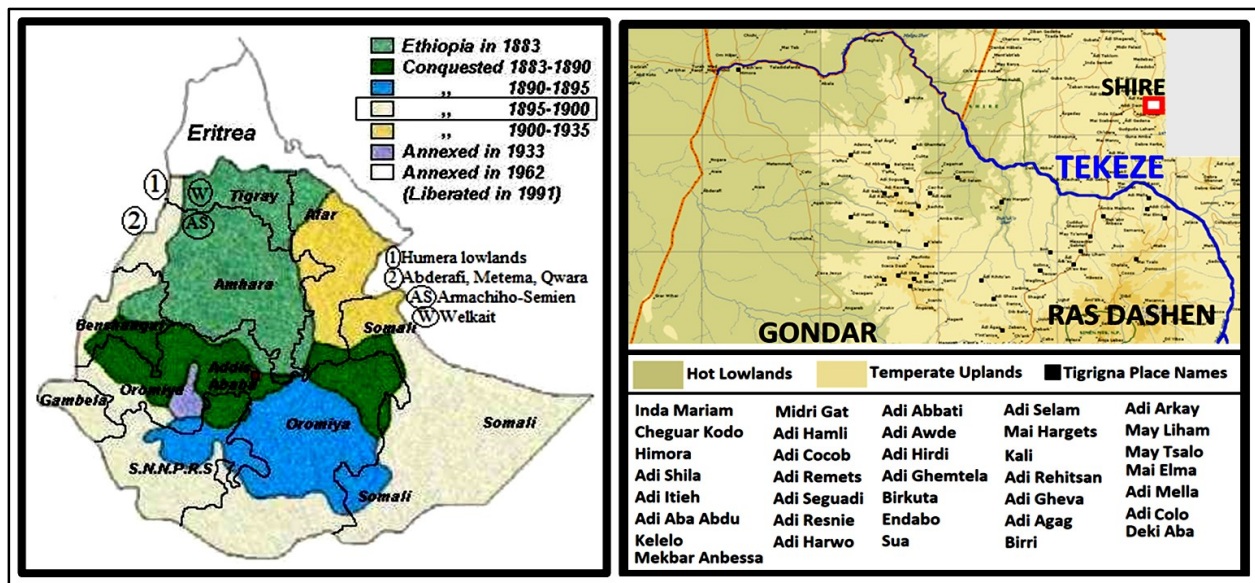
## **Part II The “Political geography of Welqait”**

One historical fact in Ethiopia worth noting in connection with the issue at hand is the settling and resettling traditions of the Amhara society. Agrarian as the Amhara society essentially are they have avoided hot and arid lowlands infested by malaria and banditry. More adventurous and daring are Tigrayans who are recognized by many as characteristically mobile and adaptive. The Oromos have outsmarted the Amhara during the centuries of what is known as “Oromo Migration” deep into the Amhara heartlands. The then pastoralist Oromos roamed the hot but green lowlands as much as they did in the mountainous and high plateau regions. Anyone traveling to Wello along the Addis Ababa-Dessie highway will notice in the Kemise area the contrast between the Oromo settled fertile lowlands of Cheffa and the degraded highlands to the west inhabited by the Amhara agrarian societies. It is only since recently that the Abbay Gorge along the Addis Ababa-Markos highway that people have started to settle for lack of options in the congested farmlands of Gojjam.

In a reverse settler colonization, the Amhara, were pushed out of their degrading farmlands in Gondar, Wello, and Shewa and moved southwards and eastwards into the Oromoland and Sidamaland. They preferred to travel long distance to familiar

highland environments in Oromia and in the South rather than to the abundant land in the adjacent lowlands. In the absence of motorized modes of transport the Amhara used convenient routes and avoided significant natural barriers. Before the advent of modern health care the vacant and extensive lowlands in Western Tigray and Southern Tigray were not inviting for the Amhara who are accustomed to the cool climate dega and weyna dega habitats. The Amhara could never have populated the Western lowlands before the long settled agrarian population of Adiabo-Shire very close by. Tekeze River is largely a seasonal stream the dry season base-flow of which is so low that it allows crossings by thousands of settlers into the Welqait and Humera areas. Tigray had more powerful war lords in the past that would not allow mass resettlement in the territories they jealously guard as their own. See Fig. 1 (Left).

Fig. 1 Directions of Expansion through the ages in Ethiopia (Left) (*Reddit*) and Tigrigna place names in **Welqait** (Right) (*Microsoft Encarta 2009*)



NB: Enhanced-Recompiled by Author. Zoom for better view.

It is less probable that the Amhara would travel difficult and very dangerous routes northwards to resettle the Welqait and Humera areas while the adjacent western lowlands of Metema, Abderafi and Kwara remained largely uninhabited. Natural barriers are almost absent en route to these lowlands as compared to the formidable elevations of the Semien Mountain system and the dangerous lowlands of the Armachiho forming impregnable barriers for human migration from Gondar to Welqait. Hence, the belief that Gondere Amhara population was already settled in



the Welqait and Humera areas before the Tigrayans did is just a myth created for the convenience of claim.

Some less informed analysts put all their trust on Tekeze River as a barrier for Tigrayans settlers to be stopped from moving into Western Tigray; they have no guts to realize their own barriers in the majesty of the Semien Mountains and the enigmatic Armachiho which have prevented them from flooding into Western Tigray although situations in their home areas made their exodus long overdue. Welqait was a familiar territory for the Axumites who may have used the route to the African interior to fetch ivory and other wildlife products for the world market of the time.

Fig 1 (Left) shows that the extensive Khafta Humera Lowlands (1) were settled only between 1895 and 1900 by the highlanders inhabiting the adjacent areas in the east. So were the lowlands west of the Amhara Region: Abderafi, Metema, and Kwara. (2) In the five years of conquest and settlement it is geographic logic that the settlers who reached Khafta Humera Lowlands (1) must have been from the adjacent Tigrayan highlands in Welqait and Adiabo. Amhara highlanders from the Gondar Highlands would naturally flock to Abderafi, Metema, and Kwara, not to the Khafta Humera Lowlands as far as rational behavior in migration is concerned. The Welqait highlands have for centuries been densely populated by Tigrigna speakers. This is witnessed by the pervasive Tigrigna place names in Welqait. World experience in place names is that they endure for centuries regardless of demographic and even cultural changes that may occur.

Oromo place names abound in Addis Ababa even after population of the City has become multi-ethnic. America and Australia may have exterminated the Native Indians and the Aborigines respectively. However, the entire USA is strewn with American Indian place-names. (See Fig. 1 Right). In Welqait the “first-nation” are Tigrigna speaking people; but unlike Native Americans and Australians Tegar in Welqait were not removed from their land or exterminated by the late arriving minority of Amhara settlers. Hence, when Welqait attained the status of a significant administrative unit, to appear on national census reports, the 1994 National census of Ethiopia reports that the proportion of Tigrigna speaking population in Welqait is 96.58%. Other weredas of Western Tigray also have a majority of Tigrigna speakers: Tselemti (89.12%), Khafta Humera (86.26%), and Tsegede (76.06). After the

“Welqait is majority Amharic speaking” propaganda failed because it cannot be sustained for long enough in the face of overwhelming demographic evidence in Welqait, two other cards were picked up although they were contradictory. The first card goes like this: “Yes, Welqait is Tigrigna speaking, but the Tigrigna spoken there is Eritrean not Tigrayan”. This card hits two birds with a single stone.

The first stone helps to dissociate Welqait from Tigray, and hence, the Gondar-friendly Eritrea not Tigray will have the right to jointly claim Welqait. The second stone is Eritreans are pleased by the compliment and would be on the side of the Amhara in their claim for possession of Welqait. The argument here seems to suggest that historically Tigrigna speakers from the Eritrean “Kebesa” migrated en masse to Welqait and established Eritrean “Kebesa” colony in Welqait. This a baffling point of argument to say the least. Imagine an exodus of Eritreans from Hamassen flocking hundreds of kilometers across the densely populated Tigrayan lands of Adwa, Axum and Shire-Adiabo. I would not expect them to have been airlifted instead early in the last century or earlier.

If we assume that by some geographic miracle Eritreans have really found themselves filling entire Welqait the Tigrigna spoken there must be a deformed Tigrigna-Italian Creole. Otherwise, if the word “Hiji” is detected in Welqait Tigrigna so it would be in Adiabo. If Tigrayans in Welqait are not all Eritreans, Tigrigna in Welqait can only be similar to that of Shire-Adiabo. It is the law of the geography of languages that people living in adjacent areas speak similar dialect of a language. Tigrigna dialect in Adwa can never be the same as that of Raya. Raya and Enderta speak a similar Tigrigna dialect because of geographical adjacency. It is sometimes difficult for a Tigrayan from Shire to feel at ease in a conversation with the distant Raya-Rayuma.

The second card, the bold but ignorant “Welqait Amhara” propagandists draw, is this: “Welqait is Tigrigna speaking Welqait, not Tigrigna speaking Tigray”. This is like saying “Gode is a Somaligna speaking Gode, not a Somaligna speaking Somali”. One more: “Welega is Oromifa speaking Welega, not Oromifa speaking Oromo”. The second card, in fact, is taken too far to call for a referendum for Welqait as an autonomous entity having little to do with Tigray. The pathetic Amhara expansionists never take defeat with grace; they leave no stone unturned to win.

As the claims for Welqait for the Amhara through the agency of “Ethiopianism” have become so noisy and boring, justifications for the unjustifiable claim have flooded the World Wide Web. Transformation has become possible from being a surgeon or an architect to a geopolitical analyst when it comes to the Welqait issue. The Amhara elite have their expertise on Welqait issue in the management degree of Achamyeleh Tamiru. On one occasion I found him in a wilderness of geographic analysis of the Welkiat issue and tried my best to rescue him (See Aiga Forum post: <http://www.aigaforum.com/article2021/how-achamyeleh-killed-geography.htm>).

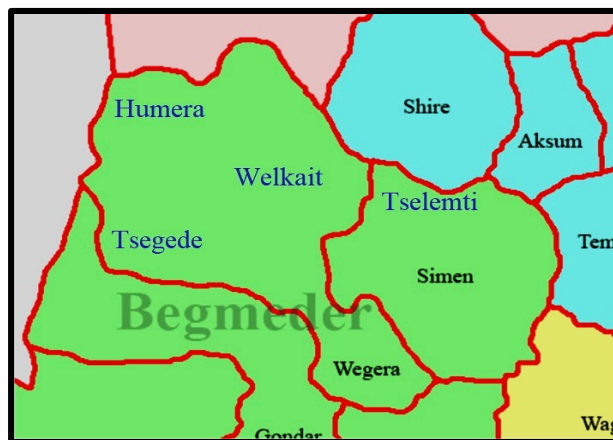
Sanjo John was very kind to Achamyeleh by recognizing his effort in 2016 “...to collect geographical and anthropological evidence from European scholars studying Abyssinia in the 19th and early 20th centuries characterizing Amhara and Tigray as historically separate kingdoms, differing in language, dress and customs, and separated by the Tekeze River.” I agree to the historical fact that the Amhara and Tigray were separate kingdoms; it is also true that they have two separate languages of the same Semitic language family. Nevertheless, I have no idea where he got the difference in dress and customs between the Amhara and Tigray. This is another of his irrelevant, this time ridiculous justification for the claim of Welqait for the Amhara.

The illiterate are also mobilized for the “Welqait for Amhara” campaign, who are put under enormous pressure to say something suitable for the media to help it toot the claim with “reliable evidence”. In the September of this year, a Gash Tesema, an old man in Welqait was interviewed to pass his knowledge about the issue to the young generation. To prove that Welqait is not part of Tigray, I believe, he has used a better geography than Achamyeleh did before. The English translation of the logic he was trying to make is as follows: “*Let alone humans even the mountains of Welqait form a single chain with the Semien Mountains of the Amhara.*” Allow me to add to the old man’s wisdom with other similar examples: The Wendo-Genet hills in Sidama are contiguous with the Bale Mountains making them parts of Oromia; Hakim Gara in Harari Urban Region is the eastern most extension of the Hararghe Highlands. Hence, Harar City belongs to Oromia. I don’t blame the old man for the fallacy; he was trying to please the media people who are more ignorant than he is.

The medical doctor and technologist, Wesenyelew Tedla and Moges Kelkelie, who subscribed into the unchartered waters of geopolitical analysis have done a lot of mess with official statistics to prove that Welqait is Amhara. First let me tip readers

about how and when population censuses and sample surveys were conducted by the authority entrusted: the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of Ethiopia. Population sample surveys and estimates of selected urban and rural areas and at some levels of administrative units have been taken for the last more than half a century. Sample surveys are helpful for research and for particular administrative purposes. However, they are too weak to be of any use for geopolitical analysis. The best population count in terms of coverage and reliability are the national censuses. The first ever national census in Ethiopia was conducted in 1984 in the context of the former provincial administrative map of Ethiopia. Since Welqait and Raya were awarded to Begemaber (Gondar) and Wello provinces respectively, in the late forties, as a punishment for Tigray, the map shows Welqait and Raya not included in the map of Tigray. In this census the population count and the ethnic composition of Welqait was counted within Gondar province as the northern part of Wegera Awraja. This wereda stretched from as far west as Humera to Dabat close to Gondar City.

Fig. 2 Map showing which awraja got the bounty robbed from Tigray



Note that the entire stretch of Western Tigray was put under the awraja administration of Wegera. Is Wegera the closest to Welqait? No! Semien awraja was the one that is geographically closer and shares border with Welqait. However, as you can see in Fig.2 far off Wegera got the bounty because the nobility or warlords in Semien awraja were historical arch rivals of the rulers of Gondar from Begemeder. Their enmity lasted until recently and seems to be still active. Taking land from their enemies and awarding it to their favorite nobles was a severe form of penalty during the period. Its most brutal application was in Tigray where it happened on two major

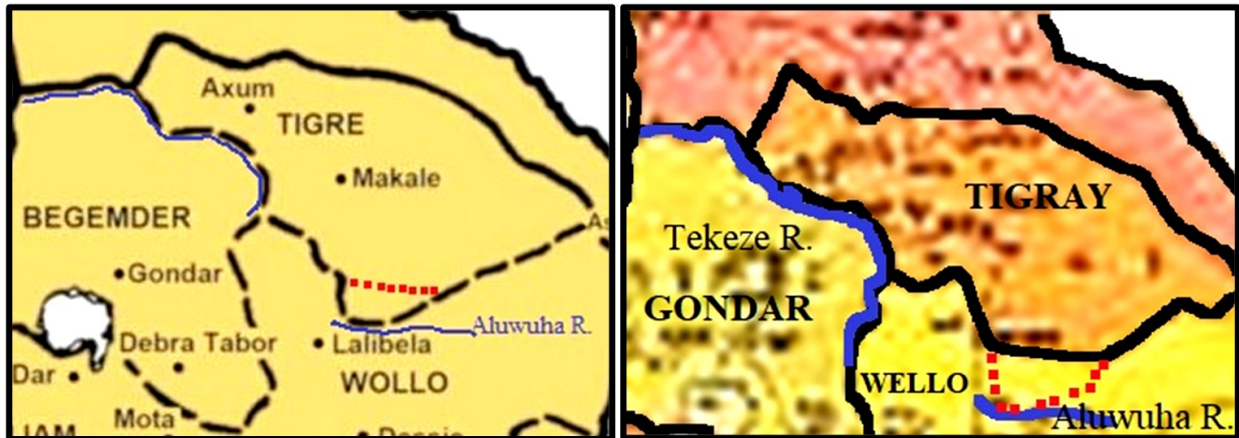
occasions: Awarding Tigray north of Mereb to Italy; and Welqait and Raya to Gondar and Wello respectively.

The proof that Wesenyelew Tedla and Moges Kelkelie have no idea about what happens in the CSA is the following statement they made: “It should be noted that TPLF made no effort to publish the regional census of 1984 and buried it with its fourteen-volume census and only issued the national summary in 1991.” The 1984 census was published by region-wise volumes by the Derg. TPLF is not expected to republish the national census report of 1984. Do Wesenyelew Tedla and Moges Kelkelie know where TPLF was in 1984? While CSA was conducting and publishing the 1984 Census TPLF and the people of Tigray were fighting a devastating drought-induced famine which killed tens of thousands. Publishing the National summary in 1991 is appropriate since that was not done before. National summary is mandatory for all censuses published in regional volumes. TPLF did not bury the volumes of the 1984 census. They can be found in the shelves of CSA and AAU libraries. Outrageous accusation does not help as methodology for analysis. After all, the value of the 1984 census report is limited in view of the fact that the administrative geographic setup has drastically changed since 1991 making the 1984 census results not comparable with the later. The best TPLF accomplished is a national census conducted 1994 on the basis of the new regionalization. Taking shelter in the irrelevant 1984 national census report in order to avoid the truth in the later censuses (particularly that of 1994) is the unjustifiable manipulation of statistics to prove ones unprovable point of Argument.

To prove that the Tigrayan population in Welqait is a minority Wesenyelew Tedla and Moges Kelkelie used the 1984 census report for the entire Gondar province. No doubt the Amhara forms the majority of 84 percent and Tigrayans account for only 6 percent. To refute the misplaced computation of ethnic composition for Welqait I use the example of student composition at some grade level. Grade ten is the entire unit of a school. Let us assume that the total number of students in grade ten is 300 and of this 50 are female students. At grade ten level (similar to entire Gondar province) the share of female students (Tigrayan population in Gondar province) of the total is 16.7 percent. No doubt the male (Amhara) are the majority constituting 83 percent. If we take one of the sections, say 10A, and the total number of students in the class is 90 and the number of female (Welqait) is 50; percentage female is computed as 55 percent. What Wesenyelew Tedla and Moges Kelkelie utterly

missed is that percentage of Tigrayans must be computed not for the entire Gondar Region but for the specific wereda of Welqait.

Fig. 4 Inconsistency of boundary markers in Imperial Ethiopia. Notice the southern border of Tigray at Alawuha (Left) (Posted by Mengistu Haile Mariam 2016 Facebook) in which unlike Tekeze in the west was crossed and the Map on the Right shows boundary north of Alawuha River (Map posted in Africa Heritage Blog in 2016). Zoom the images for better viewing.



NB: Enhanced and Recompiled by Author

Fig. 4 Arsi slashed by Shewa: How could there be any science in this?



NB: Enhanced and recompiled by author

The 1994 national census is not disputed; it is rather the 2007 national census that faced challenge from the Amhara who complained that their numbers have been slashed by two or more million. There is no truth in the allegation. It arises from the

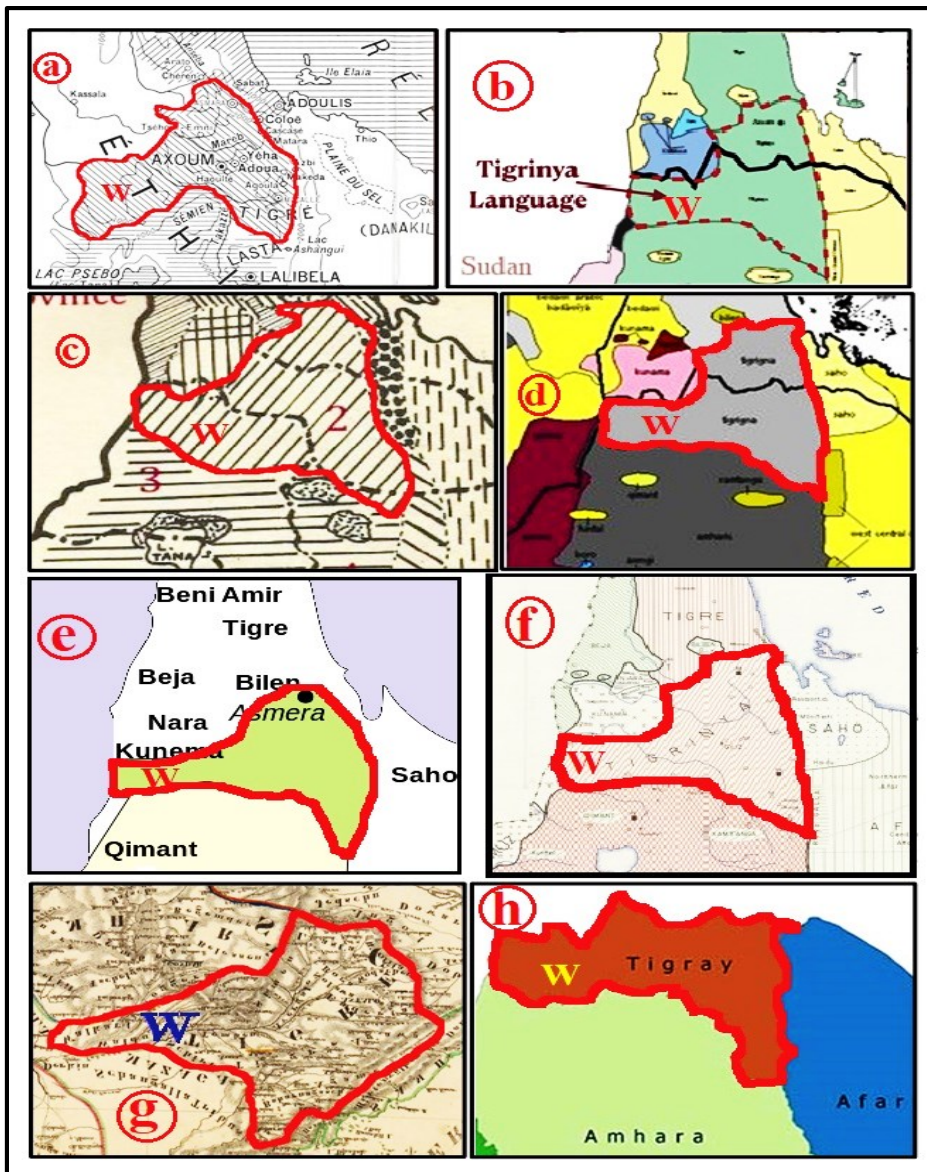
fear of the Amhara elite to the inconvenient demographic truth. The political history of national oppression in Ethiopia is tragic but amusing. There have been hundreds of thousands of Amhara born from Oromo or Sidama parents!

While we base ourselves on humans the chivalric “Welqait Campaigners” put the fate of nations in the hands of wild nature. Geologists have rightly named our age as “Anthropocene”. It means Homo-Sapiens-Sapiens has ruled the Earth so much that the dominant scape in the Planet is the culture-scape not the land-scape. Climate no more determines where we live; nor do rivers and mountain chains effectively divide us. Adherents of the unitary system hold that boundaries between internal administrative divisions would be effective and justified if they can follow river valleys. It was in the early stages of human evolution that human beings were under the command of nature. In this age of ours the command chain has turned upside down; nature takes orders from humans. The “naturalist” politicians are not a bunch of ignorant dudes. Most of them are learned, even over-learned. They are putting logic on its head to serve them in their malevolent political motives. They have little love for the old provincial map of Ethiopia, which looks like a drainage map devoid of a human face. The provinces were divided by the major rivers of Ethiopia. Their nostalgia for rivers as political boundaries serves them to curse anthropological boundaries as disuniting. This is the anti-federalist refrain in Ethiopia.

As their interest is not using rivers as boundaries per se they have not been consistent at least in Tigray. When Welqait was snatched from Tigray and awarded to Gondar in the late 1940s, by the Tigro-phobic rulers at Arat-Kilo, the Tekeze River was used as a boundary with what remained of Tigray. The criterion was not repeated in the land-robbery of Raya from Tigray by the then central government! The southern limit of Tigray was Alawuha River. This time they crossed Alawuha River and amputated Tigray along a line between Korem and Maichew. There is neither a river nor any dissimilar natural feature between the two Tigrayan towns. The decision was based on the perception of how far north the fertile lands of Raya extend to. During the Ethiopian Imperial Era the centrally located Shewa province was not just a province. It was the nucleus of the Empire the boundaries of which can change to allow the firm grip on the other provinces. Hence, the “natural formula” of boundary line determination was violated for convenience of implementing political and economic motives. Shewa province was purposely made to share borders with six of the then 14 provinces of Ethiopia: Wello, Gojjam, Wellega, Keffa, Arsi, and

Hararghe. Sidamo (Sidaama) has always been one of the greatest nations in Ethiopia. As if its geographical contact brings about firmer control the rulers in Shewa desired sharing border with Sidamo. They incorporated a third of Arsi province in the west to the Shewa province. Besides the greater control that can be exercised on Sidamo by the central rule in Shewa the famous Lakes Region was added to Shewa. Such changes in administrative boundaries have a lot of tax revenue implications for the favorite regional lords against those disfavored by the Crown. (See Fig.4).

Fig. 5 Maps of Tigrigna speaking areas: **a.** Jean Doresse 1956 (Tghat), **b.** Martin W. Lewis, **c.** Derg'map of nationalities 1978, **d.** muturzikin.com, **e.** Ethiopialanguages.svg (US Government), **f.** Map of 1976 (Jan Nyssen), **g.** Handtke's map 1849 (Tghat), **h.** Tigray federal map (logical outcome of a, b, c, d, e, f, g). \*Enhanced-Recopiled by Author. Zoom for better view. **WWW—Welqait**





The advent of Federalism in Ethiopia ushered a new era for the management of administrative geography which is in-line with the new paradigm for the determination of internal boundaries of states. Societies group and concentrate geographically based on several economic and social similarities. The most common and the most effective bond between and within societies is a shared native language. Languages embody shared history and culture which is the best criterion for ethnic self-identification. Carmen Fought, in *Language and Ethnicity*, agrees that: *“Language plays a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of ethnic identity. Ethnicity has a more striking relationship to language than other social factors such as gender, age, or social class”*. Sammy Wu adds that *“...proficiency in the ethnic language can impact ethnic belonging via personal identification, co-ethnic acceptance, and cultural connection”*. William Safran takes language much higher than its role in boundary delineation: *“Language plays a pivotal importance in the interplay between language and ethnicity, which should not be underestimated as a component for political stability”*. Linguistic federalism in Ethiopia has been a stabilizing factor besides its acceptability as an instrument for self-rule in the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia. The solution for the Welqait political geographic issue is to return Welqait to the Tigrigna speaking fold in Tigray. This is the only way geographical justice can be done in Western and Southern Tigray. See Fig. 5.