When Ideological Condemnation Replaces Historical Reasoning: Historical Revisionism, Intellectual Responsibility, and the Delegitimization of the Alliance for Survival

A Critical Response to Dr. Assefa Negash's *Critical Reflection on the Alliance for Survival*

By JG

This article critically examines Dr. Assefa Negash's *Critical Reflection on the Alliance for Survival*, focusing on its interpretation of Ethiopia's national question, the intellectual contributions of Wallelign Mekonnen, the Oromo liberation struggle, multinational federalism, and political cooperation among historically antagonistic organizations. It argues that several of the essay's principal conclusions rest on insufficiently demonstrated historical connections, questionable ideological comparisons, and incomplete constitutional analysis. In particular, similarities between Italian colonial scholarship and Ethiopian nationalist thought do not establish intellectual dependence; national self-determination cannot be equated with fascism without evidence of their defining ideological characteristics; and Ethiopia's 1995 Constitution cannot accurately be described as abolishing individual citizenship while its explicit rights provisions remain unaddressed. The article further examines the rejection of the Alliance for Survival, arguing that historical antagonisms and conflicting political objectives create substantial challenges for cooperation but do not independently establish its impossibility. Finally, it considers the responsibilities of intellectuals in politically polarized societies and the need for constitutional alternatives that reconcile equal citizenship, collective rights, democratic accountability, and peaceful political coexistence.

1. Introduction

Ethiopia's contemporary political crisis cannot be understood independently of the historical disputes surrounding state formation, national identity, political representation, territorial administration, and the distribution of authority among its diverse peoples. These questions have persisted through successive political systems,

reflecting the continuing difficulty of establishing institutions capable of reconciling competing national aspirations with democratic accountability, equal citizenship, and legitimate constitutional authority.

Against this background, Dr. Assefa Negash's *Critical Reflection on the Alliance for Survival* presents a sweeping indictment of Ethiopian national liberation movements, particularly the Oromo Liberation Front–Oromo Liberation Army (OLF–OLA) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). His argument associates their political doctrines with Italian colonial interpretations of Ethiopian history, characterizes their ideological foundations as fascist, and portrays Ethiopia's 1995 Constitution as an institutional expression of ethnic exclusion. He subsequently questions the legitimacy and sustainability of cooperation among the OLF–OLA, TPLF, and Amhara Fano within the Alliance for Survival (Negash, 2026).

These accusations warrant rigorous examination. Political movements and their leaders are not immune from criticism concerning their historical conduct and institutional commitments. Allegations of authoritarianism, ethnic discrimination, displacement, and violations of fundamental rights deserve independent investigation regardless of the political identity of those implicated. Nevertheless, the seriousness of an allegation does not establish its validity. Historical interpretation requires verifiable evidence, ideological classification demands conceptual precision, and political predictions must rest on demonstrable relationships rather than speculative assumptions.

The central weakness in Dr. Assefa's essay is the recurring distance between its premises and conclusions. Historical similarities are treated as evidence of ideological dependence, constitutional arrangements are interpreted without sufficient attention to their explicit guarantees, and political disagreements are presented as proof of inevitable organizational incompatibility. These analytical deficiencies matter because historical narratives and political classifications influence how communities understand grievances, assign responsibility, and evaluate possibilities for reconciliation.

This article examines these shortcomings through a critical analysis of historical interpretation, constitutional provisions, ideological comparisons, and the institutional

requirements of political cooperation. Its purpose is not to attribute unverified motives to Dr. Assefa but to evaluate whether his conclusions withstand historical, conceptual, and logical scrutiny.

2. Colonial Scholarship, Wallelign Mekonnen, and the Origins of Ethiopia's National Question

Dr. Assefa's historical argument begins by associating the Ethiopian national question with Italian colonial scholars, particularly Carlo Conti Rossini and Enrico Cerulli. According to his interpretation, colonial scholarship promoted an understanding of Ethiopia as an artificial political formation composed of distinct peoples, and these interpretations subsequently influenced the Ethiopian student movement and the political doctrines of national liberation organizations.

The question of colonial intellectual influence is historically legitimate. However, similarities between the interpretations of colonial scholars and those advanced by subsequent nationalist movements do not establish that the latter derived their grievances or political consciousness from the former. Demonstrating such a relationship requires identifiable evidence of intellectual transmission, adoption, and adaptation. Historical convergence alone is insufficient to establish causation.

Different generations may independently recognize and interpret comparable political realities without sharing a direct intellectual genealogy. Moreover, the political purposes for which colonial scholars employed particular historical interpretations must be distinguished from the historical validity of the questions themselves. Italian colonial authorities exploited internal divisions to advance imperial objectives, but the instrumentalization of existing grievances does not demonstrate that those grievances were imaginary.

This distinction is particularly relevant to the Oromo national question. The historical incorporation of Oromo territories into the Ethiopian state, changes in land relations, political administration, linguistic recognition, and the emergence of Oromo cultural and political mobilization require investigation on their own evidentiary merits. These processes have generated competing historical interpretations, but their significance

cannot be dismissed simply by associating selected interpretations with colonial scholarship (Jalata, 1993).

The inadequacy of the colonial-origin thesis becomes more apparent in Dr. Assefa's treatment of Wallelign Mekonnen and the Ethiopian student movement. By portraying Wallelign primarily as a victim of miseducation, he diminishes the intellectual agency of a generation that critically examined Ethiopia's political institutions, national identity, land ownership, and unequal relations of power.

Wallelign's 1969 essay, *On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia*, challenged prevailing assumptions concerning the representation and recognition of Ethiopia's diverse linguistic and cultural communities. His intervention emerged within a broader student movement influenced by international socialist and anticolonial debates while responding to domestic conditions of authoritarian governance, unequal land relations, and demands for democratic transformation (Mekonnen, 1969; Zewde, 2014).

International intellectual engagement does not negate independent political reasoning. Ethiopian students were participants in contemporary ideological debates, not necessarily passive recipients of imported doctrines. Their arguments may be criticized, but such criticism must identify specific historical inaccuracies, conceptual limitations, or weaknesses in their proposed solutions.

A substantive response to Wallelign would therefore examine whether his diagnosis of national inequality was historically justified, whether his interpretation adequately represented Ethiopia's diverse experiences, and whether his proposed political framework offered a defensible response. Dismissing his intellectual capacity does not resolve these questions.

Indeed, the persistence of disputes concerning language rights, regional self-government, political representation, and national recognition across successive Ethiopian governments demonstrates the continuing relevance of the issues raised by the student movement. And it challenges the suggestion that the national question can be explained primarily as an ideological inheritance from colonial scholarship.

Dr. Assefa's colonial-origin thesis consequently remains insufficiently demonstrated. It offers an asserted intellectual genealogy without establishing that colonial influence provides a more convincing explanation of Ethiopian nationalism than the historical conditions experienced by the communities concerned.

3. Oromo National Self-Determination and the Misapplication of Fascist Analogies

One of the most consequential features of Dr. Assefa's argument is his association of the Oromo liberation struggle with Nazi fascism. This comparison forms part of his broader rejection of multinational federalism and the political legitimacy of organizations participating in the Alliance for Survival. Yet its analytical validity depends on whether the defining characteristics of fascist ideology can be demonstrated in the doctrines and practices under examination.

Nazi ideology incorporated racial hierarchy, biological conceptions of national belonging, authoritarian domination, territorial expansionism, and systematic persecution. National self-determination, by contrast, concerns the political status and collective rights of peoples. Article 1 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right of peoples to self-determination (United Nations, 1966a, 1966b).

The Oromo liberation struggle emerged within a historical context involving political representation, land relations, cultural recognition, linguistic rights, and competing interpretations of Ethiopian state formation. Oromo political movements have advanced different constitutional and political objectives, including federal reform, autonomy, and independence (Jalata, 1993). These positions require examination according to their specific doctrines and institutional implications rather than classification through an undifferentiated ideological label.

A historical comparison with fascism would require evidence concerning racial supremacy, authoritarian political organization, exclusionary citizenship, coercive expansionism, or other defining ideological and institutional characteristics. Without

such evidence, the comparison risks confusing the assertion of collective political rights with an ideology fundamentally organized around racial domination.

Dr. Assefa's analysis is analytically bankrupt because it doesn't distinguish between legitimate criticism of particular organizations, documented violations committed by their members, and the broader principle of national self-determination. The political legitimacy of a collective claim and the accountability of an organization advancing that claim are related.

The central problem is not only that fascist analogies are impermissible but also that their application requires evidence demonstrating meaningful ideological and institutional similarities. Without such substantiation, the analogy functions more as a rhetorical condemnation than as a historically grounded explanation.

4. Constitutional Federalism: Individual Citizenship and Collective Rights

Dr. Assefa's interpretation of Ethiopia's 1995 Constitution presents another significant analytical deficiency. He argues that constitutional recognition of nations, nationalities, and peoples subordinates individuals to ethnic identity and territorial belonging, effectively abolishing universal Ethiopian citizenship. This conclusion, however, does not account for the Constitution's provisions protecting individual rights.

Article 6 establishes Ethiopian nationality, while Article 25 guarantees equality before the law and equal legal protection without discrimination. Article 38 recognizes political participation rights, including the right of Ethiopian nationals to vote and seek elected office. These provisions coexist with Article 8, which recognizes the sovereignty of nations, nationalities, and peoples, and Article 39, which addresses language, culture, self-government, and self-determination (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995).

The Constitution therefore recognizes both individual and collective dimensions of political membership. Whether these commitments have been reconciled effectively in practice is a separate question.

Ethiopia's federal arrangements have generated legitimate concerns concerning territorial administration, minority representation, political exclusion, and the relationship between regional identity and equal citizenship. Where discriminatory practices occur, they require credible investigation and institutional remedies. Nevertheless, the existence of such practices does not demonstrate that the constitutional text abolishes individual citizenship. Equally, the formal recognition of individual rights does not establish that governments have implemented those guarantees consistently.

The distinction between constitutional provisions, institutional design, and governmental conduct is essential. A legal framework may contain explicit rights guarantees while also creating structural tensions or permitting discriminatory implementation. Serious constitutional criticism must examine all three dimensions rather than treating them as interchangeable.

Political theory likewise recognizes that individual equality and collective cultural rights are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Kymlicka (1995), for example, examines how minority protections may be accommodated within liberal constitutional systems, while acknowledging the institutional challenges involved. The relevant question is therefore not whether individual citizenship must necessarily displace collective recognition, but how a constitutional system can protect both without permitting regional majorities or central authorities to exercise arbitrary power.

This issue also exposes a question of consistency in Dr. Assefa's argument. His emphasis on the historical grievances, security concerns, displacement, and political representation of Amhara communities recognizes the importance of collective interests. These concerns deserve serious examination. However, a constitutional framework that acknowledges the collective vulnerability of one community must explain how comparable interests among Oromo, Tigrayan, Amhara, Somali, Afar, Sidama, Benishangul, Gumuz, Gambella, and other communities would be protected.

A citizenship-based constitutional order could accommodate such interests through territorial federalism, decentralization, enforceable minority rights, or other institutional arrangements. Yet a general appeal to equal citizenship does not itself

resolve disputes over language policy, regional autonomy, territorial boundaries, or political representation. Dr. Assefa's constitutional criticism consequently remains incomplete. It identifies concerns about multinational federalism without sufficiently explaining how an alternative system would reconcile universal citizenship with Ethiopia's diverse collective political claims.

5. The Alliance for Survival: Political Cooperation, Historical Antagonism, and Institutional Feasibility

Dr. Assefa's rejection of the Alliance for Survival extends his historical and ideological arguments into a prediction about contemporary political cooperation. The alliance was publicly announced in September 2026 and brought together organizations with different political histories, strategic interests, and constitutional preferences. Reporting identified participation by major organizations, including the Oromo Liberation Front-Oromo Liberation Army, the Tigray People Liberation Front, an Amhara Fano National Movement, Ogaden National Liberation Front, Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front, Benishangul Peoples' Liberation Movement, and Gumuz Peoples' Democratic Movement formation. Its stated objectives included political transition and dialogue concerning Ethiopia's constitutional future (Ali, 2026; Blanchard, 2026).

The existence of disagreements among these organizations is not disputed. Their historical experiences, territorial claims, and competing political objectives create genuine challenges for cooperation. Nevertheless, these differences do not independently demonstrate that political collaboration is illegitimate or necessarily destined to collapse.

Political alliances frequently arise among actors who disagree on fundamental questions but recognize shared interests concerning an immediate political crisis. Such arrangements may be temporary, conditional, or restricted to particular objectives. Their viability depends on negotiated commitments, organizational incentives, decision-making procedures, and mechanisms for managing disputes.

Dr. Assefa invokes the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 to illustrate the dangers of cooperation among historically antagonistic political forces. The agreement between

The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union was concluded within a particular international strategic environment and was subsequently violated when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Although this historical example demonstrates how incompatible political objectives and expansionist ambitions can undermine political agreements, it does not establish that alliances among contemporary Ethiopian political organizations must follow the same trajectory. Historical analogies acquire analytical validity only when comparable political objectives, strategic incentives, and institutional commitments are empirically demonstrated. Indeed, if any member of the Alliance for Survival harbours expansionist ambitions or seeks to dominate its partners, its dissolution would be preferable to perpetuating an inherently contradictory political arrangement.

The more fundamental contradiction in Dr. Asefa's argument, however, lies in his apparent selective recognition of national rights. To the extent that he recognizes the political aspirations of one people while denying equivalent rights to others, his argument risks reproducing the very exclusionary and domination-oriented logic he attributes to fascism. Invoking national unity to justify territorial expansion, political subordination, or forced assimilation does not make such practices legitimate. Genuine unity rests on voluntary association, mutual recognition, political equality, and consent rather than coercion and domination. Consequently, if Dr. Asefa legitimizes political domination in the name of Ethiopian unity while equating resistance to such domination with fascism, his argument suffers from a profound conceptual contradiction and an inconsistent application of historical analogy.

A more rigorous evaluation of the Alliance for Survival would therefore examine its internal decision-making arrangements, mechanisms for resolving territorial disputes, commitments to civilian protection, accountability procedures, and proposed framework for political transition. It would also consider the risks associated with unequal organizational capacities, competing leadership interests, and the possibility that opposition to the incumbent government may prove insufficient to sustain cooperation.

These are substantial questions that cannot be resolved by ideological condemnation alone. The alliance's stated objectives do not guarantee its effectiveness, but its members' historical disagreements do not establish its impossibility. The appropriate

analytical issue is whether participating organizations can create credible institutions through which their differences may be negotiated without renewed confrontation. Dr. Assefa's categorical rejection provides insufficient examination of these institutional possibilities and risks treating political disagreement itself as evidence that accommodation should not be attempted.

6. Intellectual Responsibility, Political Stigmatization, and the Risks of Polarization

The cumulative weaknesses in Dr. Assefa's argument raise broader concerns about intellectual responsibility in a politically polarized society. His association of national liberation movements with colonial ideology, characterization of Oromo self-determination through fascist analogies, categorical interpretation of constitutional provisions, and prediction of inevitable alliance failure share a recurring analytical problem: conclusions are advanced without sufficiently demonstrating the historical or causal relationships necessary to sustain them.

These shortcomings invite scrutiny of the methods through which political arguments are constructed and communicated. The relevant issue is not whether the author holds strong political convictions, but whether those convictions have displaced careful distinctions between evidence, interpretation, and ideological judgment.

Political criticism becomes particularly consequential when organizations and their constituencies are described through sweeping classifications that obscure internal diversity. Criticism of an organization's ideology or documented conduct is legitimate. However, extending organizational responsibility indiscriminately to entire national communities risks reinforcing collective suspicion and presenting political differences as permanent ethnic antagonisms.

The historical experiences of Nazi Germany and Rwanda demonstrate the dangers associated with systematic dehumanization and incitement. Joseph Goebbels played a central role in the Nazi propaganda apparatus, while Hassan Ngeze disseminated extremist anti-Tutsi propaganda through *Kangura* during the period preceding the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. These historical cases illustrate why political rhetoric involving collective stigmatization deserves careful scrutiny.

In Ethiopia, where competing historical narratives, political grievances, armed conflict, and civilian insecurity have created conditions in which public commentary can influence inter-communal perceptions. Intellectual responsibility requires distinguishing specific organizational actions from collective identities, acknowledging contested historical interpretations, and avoiding the presentation of speculative political conclusions as established facts.

The implications extend to younger generations. Ethiopian youth inherit unresolved debates concerning historical injustice, state formation, national liberation, territorial belonging, and political legitimacy. Scholarship should equip them to investigate these questions critically rather than reproduce inherited antagonisms without examination.

Dr. Assefa's essay should consequently be evaluated not only by the political positions it advances but also by the quality of historical understanding it provides. A rigorous intellectual contribution would identify verifiable evidence, consider competing interpretations, apply ideological concepts consistently, and explain how political disagreements might be addressed through legitimate institutions. The responsibility of scholarship is not to eliminate disagreement but to make disagreement more informed, precise, and capable of peaceful resolution.

7. The Missing Constitutional Alternative and Ethiopia's Political Future

The preceding criticisms converge on a central question that Dr. Assefa's essay does not adequately resolve: what constitutional and political order should replace the arrangements he rejects?

His emphasis on democratization, equal citizenship, and opposition to exclusionary ethnic politics identifies important constitutional concerns. However, these principles do not constitute a complete institutional framework capable of addressing Ethiopia's competing national aspirations. If the constitutional recognition of nations, nationalities, and peoples is to be replaced or substantially revised, an alternative must clarify the foundations of political sovereignty, the distribution of authority between central and regional institutions, the protection of linguistic and cultural rights, and the mechanisms through which territorial disagreements would be resolved.

Possible constitutional models include territorial federalism, administrative decentralization, a unitary arrangement with constitutionally protected local autonomy, or revised multinational federalism. Each presents distinct opportunities and institutional risks. Their suitability cannot be determined solely through rejection of the existing constitutional order. A credible alternative must also explain how the legitimate collective interests of different communities would be accommodated consistently. Equal citizenship requires enforceable individual rights, but the recognition of individual equality does not automatically resolve questions of language, cultural identity, regional self-government, and political representation.

The same institutional challenge applies to political transition. Rejecting cooperation among organizations with conflicting historical narratives does not eliminate the disagreements those organizations represent. Nor does forming a different political coalition necessarily resolve the grievances of excluded constituencies. Ethiopia's political future therefore requires more than agreement on the shortcomings of existing institutions. It requires a framework through which fundamental disagreements can be negotiated without coercion or renewed armed confrontation.

Such a framework should incorporate independent judicial institutions, enforceable constitutional rights, accountable public administration, credible civilian protection, and agreed procedures for resolving territorial and constitutional disputes. Political participation must be accompanied by commitments to peaceful dispute resolution and accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Historical grievances must be acknowledged without becoming permanent grounds for collective exclusion. National self-determination must be considered without permitting the denial of individual rights. Political organizations must be accountable for their conduct without transferring responsibility indiscriminately to the communities they claim to represent.

The central challenge, therefore, is to construct a legitimate political order capable of accommodating diversity and resolving political disagreements through institutional mechanisms rather than attempting to suppress them through ideological denunciation. In this respect, Dr. Assefa's critique is not only destructive in its implications but also backward-looking in its orientation, insofar as it delegitimizes competing political

aspirations without articulating a viable constitutional or institutional alternative. A constructive and forward-looking political discourse should move beyond historical stigmatization and ideological antagonism toward identifying sustainable political arrangements that address the underlying historical grievances, constitutional contradictions, and institutional deficiencies. The intellectual responsibility of political scholarship is not merely to denounce competing political visions but to contribute to the development of a legitimate, inclusive, and sustainable political order founded on equality, mutual recognition, democratic consent, and the peaceful resolution of fundamental political disagreements.

8. Implications for Historical and Political Analysis

The weaknesses identified in Dr. Assefa's essay have implications beyond the immediate debate over the Alliance for Survival. They demonstrate the importance of distinguishing four analytical questions that are frequently conflated in Ethiopian political discourse.

First, the historical origins of a political movement must be distinguished from the validity of the grievances it advances. Second, ideological classification must be based on identifiable characteristics rather than rhetorical association. Political movements should be evaluated according to their doctrines, institutions, and documented conduct. Third, constitutional criticism must distinguish legal provisions from institutional design and actual implementation. The existence of constitutional rights does not guarantee their enforcement, while discriminatory practices do not automatically negate the presence of those rights in the constitutional text. Fourth, the feasibility of political cooperation must be assessed through organizational incentives, negotiated commitments, and dispute-resolution mechanisms rather than predictions derived from historical analogies.

These distinctions are essential to responsible political analysis because they require claims to be tested against evidence and alternative explanations. They also provide a more reliable foundation for evaluating constitutional reform, political transition, and the prospects for peaceful coexistence.

9. Conclusion

Dr. Assefa Negash's *Critical Reflection on the Alliance for Survival* raises legitimate questions concerning Ethiopia's political history, multinational federalism, national self-determination, and cooperation among organizations with conflicting political objectives. However, several of its principal conclusions remain insufficiently supported by historical evidence, constitutional interpretation, and institutional analysis.

The asserted intellectual dependence of Ethiopian national movements on Italian colonial scholarship is not established through demonstrated pathways of influence. The dismissal of Wallelign Mekonnen does not resolve the historical questions his work addressed. The characterization of Oromo national self-determination as fascist requires evidence of defining ideological characteristics, while the assertion that Ethiopia's Constitution abolishes individual citizenship overlooks its explicit guarantees of individual rights.

Similarly, historical antagonisms among members of the Alliance for Survival create serious political challenges but do not independently establish that cooperation is impossible. Evaluating the alliance requires examination of its objectives, institutional commitments, and mechanisms for managing disagreements.

The central deficiency of Dr. Assefa's argument is therefore not its willingness to challenge established political movements or constitutional arrangements. It is the recurring substitution of ideological classification and historical analogy for demonstrated causal explanation, accompanied by an insufficiently developed alternative political framework.

Ethiopia's political future requires historically informed dialogue, equal protection of individual and collective rights, democratic accountability, and credible institutions for resolving fundamental disagreements peacefully. Intellectual contributions to this process must be judged by the strength of their evidence, the consistency of their reasoning, and their capacity to clarify rather than deepen the divisions they seek to explain.

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