

From Resistance to Governance: Jawar Mohammed's Progressive Patriotism and the Oromo's Ownership of Ethiopian Nationalism

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Abstract

The relationship between Oromo nationalism and Ethiopian nationalism has long been shaped by struggles over political power, historical memory, cultural recognition, and the meaning of statehood. For much of modern Ethiopian history, the Ethiopian state-building project was associated with centralized authority, cultural homogenization, and the marginalization of groups whose languages and political identities differed from those of the ruling elite. Oromo nationalism emerged partly in response to these historical experiences, demanding recognition, self-government, equality, and self-determination. Yet the political trajectory of Oromo nationalism has not been confined to resistance or demands for separation. The emergence of Oromo political actors at the center of Ethiopian politics, particularly through the rise of Abiy Ahmed in 2018 and Jawar Mohammed's subsequent intervention in debates over national identity, has raised a different question: can Oromo nationalism help redefine Ethiopian nationalism from within?

This article examines Jawar Mohammed's call for a transition from resistance politics to governance politics, and from ethnonationalism to broader nation-building, represents a significant shift in the political discourse surrounding the Oromo struggle and Ethiopia's future. It also analyzes Jawar Mohammed's concept of *Progressive Patriotism*, Abiy Ahmed's political project of *Medemer*, and Jawar's reflections on the Goobana Daacee hero-traitor narrative. The author argues that these developments represent competing, and sometimes contradictory, attempts to move beyond the historical opposition between Ethiopian state nationalism and Oromo self-determination. Progressive Patriotism potentially offers a framework for reconciling durable ethnic identities with a shared national political community. However, its credibility depends on democratic institutions, constitutional protections, political pluralism, and an explicit rejection of coercive assimilation. Abiy Ahmed's experience illustrates the dangers of attempting to build national cohesion by weakening the political forces and constitutional guarantees through which historically marginalized communities sought recognition. The article concludes that Oromo ownership of Ethiopian nationalism is inevitable and it should involve transforming Ethiopian nationalism into an inclusive political project founded on equal citizenship, meaningful regional self-government, constitutional democracy, political pluralism, and mutual recognition of all Ethiopians.

Keywords: Oromo nationalism, Ethiopian nationalism, Progressive Patriotism, Medemer, ethnonationalism, multinational federalism, Goobana Daacee, constitutional patriotism.

1. Introduction: Who Owns Ethiopian Nationalism?

One of the most consequential questions in Ethiopian politics is whether Ethiopian nationalism belongs equally to all the peoples of Ethiopia or remains tied to a particular historical interpretation of the state. This question is especially important for the Oromo, Ethiopia's largest ethnolinguistic community, whose relationship with the modern Ethiopian state has been shaped by conquest, land dispossession, political exclusion, cultural marginalization, and subsequent struggles for recognition and self-government.

The problem, however, is not simply whether Oromos should identify with Ethiopia. It is whether they can regard Ethiopia as equally their own without surrendering their Oromo identity, political rights, or historical memory.

Historically, Ethiopian nationalism has often been associated with territorial unity, centralized state authority, and a common national identity. Critics of this tradition argue that state-building frequently privileged Amharic and Orthodox Christian cultural institutions and marginalized other languages, religious traditions, and political identities. These historical processes contributed to the development of Oromo nationalism and other ethnonationalist movements that challenged the political order ([Markakis, 2011](#); [Jalata, 1993](#)).

The adoption of multinational federalism in the 1995 Constitution formally changed the terms of this relationship. The Constitution recognized the rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples, including self-government and self-determination. Article 39 explicitly recognizes the right to self-determination up to and including secession. Yet constitutional recognition did not automatically produce democratic governance, equitable representation, or an enduring settlement of competing national aspirations.

The political crisis that culminated in the 2014–2018 protests exposed the limits of the existing order. Oromo protesters mobilized against political exclusion, human rights abuses, and the proposed expansion of Addis Ababa into surrounding Oromia. Protests also reflected broader dissatisfaction with the distribution of power under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The resulting political transition created an opportunity to reconsider both the structure of the Ethiopian state and the relationship between Oromo political aspirations and national unity.

The appointment of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister in 2018 symbolized this opportunity. An Oromo politician had reached the highest office in the Ethiopian state, creating expectations that Oromo grievances might be addressed while the country moved toward a more democratic and inclusive political system.

Jawar Mohammed, whose political activism and media influence had helped shape Oromo political consciousness, subsequently became an important voice in the debate over what should follow the era of resistance. His concept of *Progressive Patriotism* sought to articulate a political position that could acknowledge ethnic identity while promoting a shared Ethiopian national identity.

The central argument of this article is that **Oromo nationalism is potentially moving from a politics of demanding recognition within Ethiopia toward a politics of participating in the definition of Ethiopia itself**. This transition is neither automatic nor complete. Its success depends

on whether Oromo political actors can help construct an Ethiopian state in which national belonging is compatible with self-government, cultural equality, and democratic choice.

2. Oromo Nationalism: From Resistance to Political Agency

Oromo nationalism did not emerge in a political vacuum. Its development must be understood in the context of the expansion and consolidation of the modern Ethiopian state, the incorporation of Oromo territories, and subsequent struggles over land, language, religion, political representation, and cultural recognition.

Historical accounts differ in their interpretation of state formation, the character of imperial expansion, and the experiences of communities incorporated into the Ethiopian empire. Nevertheless, the historical relationship between state centralization and demands for Oromo recognition is essential to understanding the emergence of modern Oromo nationalism.

Asafa Jalata's *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse* examines Oromo national consciousness in relation to domination, resistance, and the broader Ethiopian political order (Jalata, 1993). John Markakis likewise situates the Ethiopian state within a history of contested incorporation, political exclusion, and struggles over the country's territorial and political frontiers ([Markakis, 2011](#)).

These perspectives help explain why Oromo nationalism cannot be reduced to an irrational rejection of national unity. For many Oromo political actors, the central concern has been whether unity is established through equal citizenship and negotiated consent or maintained through political domination.

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), founded in 1973, became a prominent expression of Oromo nationalism. Other political organizations later developed alternative strategies, including participation in electoral politics, constitutional reform, and federalist arrangements within Ethiopia. These differences reveal an important fact: Oromo nationalism has never been synonymous with a single political program.

Some Oromos advocate independence; others support multinational federalism, stronger regional autonomy, or a democratic Ethiopian state that protects Oromo rights. Still others prioritize security, economic development, religious freedom, or political accountability over the constitutional question of independence versus union.

The Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), the OLF, the Prosperity Party (PP), and other political formations reflect different approaches to these questions, although none should automatically be treated as a comprehensive representation of Oromo public opinion.

The distinction matters because a national movement's historical contribution does not give it an unlimited mandate to determine the future of an entire people. Self-determination must include the freedom to choose among competing political arrangements.

Consequently, the evolution of Oromo nationalism should not be measured solely by the growth of resistance movements or the pursuit of independence. It should also be measured by the ability of Oromo citizens and political representatives to influence national institutions, constitutional arrangements, public policy, and the meaning of Ethiopian citizenship.

This brings us to a broader proposition: Oromo nationalism can become a transformative force in Ethiopian politics when it moves beyond asking whether Oromos belong to Ethiopia and begins asking what kind of Ethiopia can belong equally to Oromos and all other citizens.

3. The Historical Contradiction: Ethiopian Unity and Ethnonationalist Resistance

The tension between Ethiopian nationalism and Oromo nationalism is frequently described as a conflict between centripetal and centrifugal political forces.

Centripetal forces seek to strengthen a common state, national institutions, and a shared political identity. Centrifugal forces emphasize regional autonomy, ethnic self-government, or the right of distinct communities to determine their political status. These categories can be analytically useful, but they should not be confused with a moral distinction between patriotism and disloyalty. Centralizing projects can promote public institutions and shared citizenship, but they can also become instruments of domination. Ethnonationalist movements can defend marginalized communities, but they can also become exclusionary, authoritarian, or intolerant of internal dissent ([Neja 2024](#)).

The critical question is how these political forces interact.

In Ethiopia, demands for ethnonational self-government developed partly in response to a long history of centralized state-building. The EPRDF's adoption of multinational federalism in the 1990s represented an institutional response to these historical grievances. It recognized ethnic and linguistic communities as political constituencies and established regional states intended to provide self-government.

Yet the federal arrangement developed under a dominant-party system. Formal recognition of ethnic rights coexisted with restrictions on political competition, uneven accountability, and conflicts over regional boundaries, minority rights, and the distribution of power ([Aalen, 2002](#); [Vaughan, 2003](#)).

This contradiction helps explain why multinational federalism could be both a significant constitutional achievement and an incomplete democratic project.

The problem was not simply the recognition of ethnic identity. It was the failure to establish sufficiently inclusive democratic institutions through which competing interests could be negotiated and constitutional rights consistently protected.

In my earlier analysis, *PM Abiy Ahmed's Coercive Policy Against Ethnonationalism Is a Self-Inflicted Vicious Cycle* ([Neja, 2024](#)), I argued that attempting to suppress ethnonationalism without

addressing the grievances that sustain it risks reinforcing the very mobilization the government seeks to overcome.

The argument is straightforward. When citizens perceive their identity, political autonomy, or historical grievances as threatened, coercive measures may strengthen their attachment to ethnonationalist movements. Resistance then prompts additional repression, which can deepen mistrust and prolong conflict. This is not an argument that every ethnonationalist demand is justified or that every movement claiming to defend a community represents its interests. It is an argument that political identities cannot be eliminated sustainably through force alone. Democratic institutions offer a different possibility: they can provide channels through which ethnic, regional, and national identities coexist without requiring one to defeat the others.

4. Abiy Ahmed and the Opportunity for Oromo Political Transformation

Abiy Ahmed's rise to the premiership in April 2018 was a pivotal moment in this history. As an Oromo politician emerging from within the EPRDF system, he initially represented the possibility of a new political settlement.

His early reform agenda generated expectations of political liberalization, reconciliation, the release of political prisoners, and greater openness. His government's peace initiative with Eritrea in 2018 further strengthened the image of a leader seeking to move beyond longstanding regional hostility.

For Oromo constituencies that had participated in the 2014–2018 protests, the transition raised a crucial expectation: that the political energy generated by resistance would be translated into democratic reform. This expectation went beyond the symbolic importance of having an Oromo prime minister. Oromo political empowerment required meaningful changes in governance, constitutional practice, representation, and accountability. The identity of the leader could not substitute for institutional transformation.

Abiy's subsequent political project, associated with the formation of the Prosperity Party in 2019 and the language of *Medemer*, sought to promote unity, cooperation, and a common Ethiopian political identity. Supporters interpreted this approach as an attempt to overcome political fragmentation and the limitations of ethnic-based party organization. Critics, including Oromo nationalists, argued that it weakened the political and institutional protections established under multinational federalism.

These competing interpretations cannot be resolved simply by identifying Abiy as an Oromo leader or by assuming that his political program necessarily served Oromo interests. His policies must be evaluated through their institutional consequences and their effects on citizens' rights.

The war in Tigray, the subsequent armed conflicts in other regions, political polarization, and serious allegations of abuses by state and non-state actors exposed the limitations of a political transition that did not produce a broadly accepted democratic settlement. Human rights investigations and reports by international organizations documented grave abuses during the

Tigray conflict and other periods of violence, underscoring the need for accountability across political and military institutions ([EHRC and OHCHR, 2021](#); [International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, 2022](#)).

The broader lesson is that an Oromo's accession to the center of Ethiopian power does not automatically mean that Oromo nationalism has achieved its democratic objectives.

Indeed, the experience raises a difficult question: can Oromo political agency transform the Ethiopian state if the institutions through which Oromo grievances were articulated become weakened or marginalized?

The answer depends on whether political leadership translates symbolic representation into constitutional protection, democratic competition, and equal citizenship.

An Oromo-led government is not necessarily an Oromo-empowering government, just as an Ethiopian national identity is not necessarily an exclusionary identity. The decisive issue is the character of the institutions and policies through which political power is exercised.

5. Jawar Mohammed's Progressive Patriotism: A Search for Political Synthesis

Jawar Mohammed's *Progressive Patriotism* can be understood as an attempt to address the unresolved relationship between ethnic self-determination and Ethiopian national unity.

The concept seeks to move beyond the assumption that Oromo political identity and Ethiopian national identity must be mutually exclusive. It acknowledges that ethnic identities are durable political and social realities while arguing that a shared national identity and common political institutions remain possible. This is an important intervention because it challenges two competing assumptions.

The first is that Ethiopian unity requires diminishing or transcending ethnic identities. The second is that meaningful Oromo self-determination necessarily requires separation from Ethiopia.

Progressive Patriotism offers a possible alternative: a shared Ethiopian political community that recognizes ethnic identities and accommodates them through democratic institutions.

In principle, this framework could support a country in which Oromo citizens maintain their language, cultural identity, regional autonomy, and historical consciousness while participating fully in national institutions. Ethiopian citizenship would not require the abandonment of Oromummaa, and Oromo identity would not automatically require rejection of Ethiopia.

However, the concept faces a serious challenge. The challenge begins with the former political constituency and stand of Jawar and perspectives of many elite opponents that criticize him ([Dache, 2026](#)). A political framework cannot reconcile competing national aspirations merely by naming a middle ground. It must explain how the proposed relationship would work in practice.

Several questions therefore require clear answers:

1. What constitutional powers should regional states possess?
2. How should the rights of ethnic minorities within regional states be protected?
3. How can citizens participate in national politics without being compelled to organize exclusively along ethnic lines?
4. How should disputes over territory, language, resources, and representation be resolved?
5. What mechanisms would prevent the federal government from using national unity as a justification for centralization?
6. What guarantees would ensure that regional authorities cannot use ethnic self-government to suppress internal minorities or political opposition?

Without answers to these questions, Progressive Patriotism risks remaining an attractive but ambiguous political slogan.

Its potential value lies not in replacing one ideological label with another, but in articulating an institutional settlement that combines constitutional democracy, meaningful self-government, equal citizenship, and a shared national political community.

6. From Resistance to Governance

6.1 Jawar's Response to Goobana Narrative

Jawar Mohammed's discussion of Goobana Daacee offers a second perspective on the transition from Oromo resistance politics to participation in the governance of Ethiopia. In his text, *GOOBANAA: Seenessa gootaa-gantuu qabsoo Oromoo keessatti*, translated here as “*Goobana: The Hero-Traitor Narrative in the Oromo Struggle*”, Jawar examines how political movements construct historical narratives that distinguish heroes from traitors ([Jawar Mohammed, 2026](#)).

He argues that such narratives can serve important political purposes. They mobilize communities, establish collective memory, define political loyalties, and provide moral explanations for past suffering. By identifying heroes and traitors, a movement can construct a coherent story about the origins of injustice, the meaning of resistance, and the future it seeks to achieve.

Within the Oromo national movement's historical narrative, Goobana Daacee became a symbol of collaboration with Menelik II and, consequently, of betrayal. His historical role was interpreted through the broader experience of Oromo incorporation into the expanding Ethiopian empire.

Jawar's argument is not simply about whether Goobana should be remembered as a hero or a traitor. It concerns the political consequences of using historical figures as fixed symbols of national virtue or disloyalty. He suggests that the repeated use of betrayal narratives can become divisive when the label of *Goobana* is extended to contemporary political opponents or used to settle internal factional disputes. A narrative originally intended to strengthen resistance can become a mechanism for policing political identity and excluding those who disagree. This observation has particular significance when a movement moves from resistance to governance. A movement operating in opposition can organize its political identity around a clear distinction

between the oppressed and the oppressor, resistance and collaboration, or liberation and betrayal. A political movement that enters government, however, must negotiate competing interests, govern citizens with different identities, and build institutions that extend beyond its original constituency.

The transition creates pressure to reconsider inherited political narratives.

Jawar argues that political movements may need to move from a resistance narrative toward a governing narrative. Figures previously condemned for their relationship with the Ethiopian state may be reassessed in the context of a broader national history. Conversely, figures celebrated within a resistance narrative may be subjected to new scrutiny concerning their conduct in government. This transition carries risks. If a movement abruptly repudiates the narrative that sustained its political mobilization, it may alienate its original supporters. If it preserves the narrative without reconsideration, it may struggle to govern a pluralistic society.

Jawar's interpretation of Abiy Ahmed's political difficulties partly follows this logic refereeing to [PM Abiy Ahmed interview on OBN](#). He suggests that dismantling the Oromo resistance narrative before establishing a credible and inclusive governing narrative created a crisis of political meaning for parts of the Oromo constituency. This is an interpretation rather than a complete explanation of Abiy's political trajectory. Conflict, security concerns, elite competition, institutional weaknesses, and the conduct of political actors also require examination. Nevertheless, Jawar's framework identifies a genuine political challenge: a leader cannot assume that a symbolic appeal to national unity will automatically replace the historical experiences and political commitments that shaped a community's demands.

The Goobana narrative therefore connects directly to Progressive Patriotism. Both concern the possibility of changing political identity without simply erasing the past.

If Ethiopian nationalism is to become equally meaningful to Oromos, it cannot depend on demanding that Oromos abandon the memories through which they understand their history. Nor can Oromo nationalism become an inclusive democratic project if it requires citizens to accept one approved interpretation of the past. The task is not to replace every hero with a traitor or every traitor with a hero. It is to create a political culture in which historical disagreements can be examined without becoming grounds for denying citizenship, identity, or political legitimacy.

6.2. An Oromo's Ownership of Ethiopian Nationalism

Jawar Mohammed's call for a transition from resistance politics to governance politics, and from ethnonationalism to broader nation-building, represents a significant shift in the political discourse surrounding the Oromo struggle and Ethiopia's future. For decades, Oromo political mobilization was largely shaped by resistance to historical marginalization, cultural suppression, political exclusion, and the denial of self-determination. Within this context, defending Oromo identity, rights, and political autonomy became central objectives. However, the political landscape changed considerably after 2018, when Oromo political actors assumed influential positions within the federal government and the Oromia regional administration. This transformation raises a

fundamental question: if the Oromo are no longer merely struggling to gain access to state power but are also participating in exercising it, what should the next phase of Oromo politics look like?

Jawar's argument is that Oromo politics must evolve beyond its traditional oppositional orientation. A movement that has historically defined itself through resistance must also demonstrate its capacity to govern, build institutions, deliver public services, strengthen the economy, maintain security, uphold the rule of law, and contribute to national stability. In this sense, the transition from resistance to governance is not simply a change in political strategy; it is a test of political maturity and institutional responsibility. Political legitimacy cannot be sustained indefinitely through historical grievances or the language of liberation alone. It must also be demonstrated through accountable leadership, effective institutions, democratic participation, and tangible improvements in people's lives.

Equally important is Jawar's suggestion that Oromo political consciousness should expand from an exclusively ethnonationalist orientation toward a broader sense of national responsibility. This proposition does not necessarily require the abandonment of Oromo identity, cultural rights, or self-government. Rather, it challenges the assumption that protecting Oromo interests and building a common Ethiopian political future are mutually exclusive objectives. Given the Oromo people's demographic significance, geographical position, cultural influence, and historical role in Ethiopia, their political participation is essential to any sustainable project of national reconstruction. The Oromo should therefore see themselves not only as a people whose rights must be protected within Ethiopia, but also as stakeholders with an equal responsibility and legitimate claim to shape the country's political destiny.

This perspective Jawar recently explained on [Kallattii Media](#) introduces an important dimension to the debate over Ethiopian nationalism: **Ethiopian nationalism should not be understood as an identity or political project owned exclusively by historically dominant groups.** Oromos, like other peoples of Ethiopia, have an equal right to define, shape, and participate in the national project. Indeed, an Oromo can embrace Ethiopian citizenship, contribute to national unity, and take pride in a shared political identity without surrendering Oromo cultural identity or constitutional rights. From this standpoint, Jawar's Progressive Patriotism potentially challenges the historical tendency to associate Ethiopian nationalism with cultural assimilation, political centralization, or the dominance of one group. It opens the possibility of an inclusive nationalism in which belonging to Ethiopia does not require becoming less Oromo.

Nevertheless, this transition involves important political risks and unresolved questions. For many Oromos, calls for national unity and broader Ethiopian identity may evoke historical experiences in which national integration was pursued through coercion, assimilation, and the suppression of regional autonomy. Consequently, any attempt to move beyond ethnonationalism must clearly distinguish inclusive nation-building from a return to centralized political domination. National unity cannot be achieved by weakening the constitutional rights of nations and nationalities, dismissing legitimate demands for self-government, or imposing a single national identity. Similarly, the existence of Oromo political leaders in federal institutions does not automatically mean that the Oromo population has achieved meaningful political representation, democratic participation, or institutional control.

The continuing armed conflict and political fragmentation in Oromia further complicate this transition. A genuine shift from resistance to governance requires more than rhetorical appeals to patriotism. It requires credible political dialogue, inclusive institutions, civilian protection, accountability, respect for constitutional rights, and peaceful mechanisms for resolving political disagreements. It also requires Oromo political leaders to demonstrate that they can govern democratically and responsibly, rather than simply replace one form of political exclusion with another. Without these conditions, the language of nation-building may be interpreted as an attempt to silence legitimate grievances rather than resolve them.

Ultimately, the significance of Jawar Mohammed's Progressive Patriotism lies in its attempt to challenge the false choice between Oromo self-determination and Ethiopian national belonging. Its most constructive interpretation is not that Oromos should abandon their national aspirations in favor of an imposed Ethiopian identity, but that they should participate in building an Ethiopia in which their identity, rights, autonomy, and political aspirations are constitutionally protected. In such a political arrangement, Oromo ownership of Ethiopian nationalism would be neither symbolic nor conditional; it would be reflected in equal citizenship, shared political power, democratic institutions, and mutual recognition among the country's diverse peoples.

According to my understanding, moving from ethnonationalism to nation-building should not mean moving away from Oromo identity. It should mean transforming the political struggle to protect that identity into a broader democratic project in which Oromos have an equal stake in shaping the future of Ethiopia.

7. Jawar and Abiy: Convergence, Divergence, and Political Contradiction

Jawar Mohammed and Abiy Ahmed have occupied different political positions, but their public interventions illuminate a shared problem: how to move beyond the political arrangements and narratives that emerged from Ethiopia's conflicts over national identity.

Abiy's [*Medemer*](#) emphasizes synthesis, cooperation, and the aspiration to transcend divisive political identities. Jawar's *Progressive Patriotism*, as discussed in the materials examined here, places greater emphasis on accepting ethnic identity as a durable political reality that must be reconciled with a shared national identity.

The distinction is consequential.

A project that seeks to transcend ethnic divisions may be interpreted as an appeal to a common national identity that should supersede ethnic political mobilization. A project that seeks to accommodate ethnic identities within a shared national framework begins from the premise that those identities may remain politically important for the foreseeable future.

These positions are not necessarily incompatible. A democratic national identity can grow stronger while ethnic identities remain meaningful. But the two approaches diverge when national unity is

interpreted as requiring the political weakening of ethnic self-government or when ethnic self-government is treated as incompatible with common national institutions.

The central question is whether unity is achieved through democratic negotiation or through the concentration of authority. Abiy's political trajectory illustrates the danger of conflating national integration with political centralization. Critics of his government argue that its approach to opposition movements and regional political authority has often failed to provide an inclusive settlement of competing grievances ([Neja, 2024](#)). The armed conflicts and political polarization that followed the initial reform period demonstrate that national unity cannot be secured by rhetoric alone.

Jawar's intervention is potentially important because it recognizes the need for a political framework that does not force a choice between permanent ethnonationalist confrontation and a unitary state. Nevertheless, Progressive Patriotism must also be assessed critically. If it is intended to reconcile ethnic autonomy and national loyalty, it must explain how each is protected when their political demands conflict. If it merely asks Oromo nationalists to moderate their demands while leaving the underlying distribution of power unchanged, it will not resolve the problem. Equally, if it treats ethnonationalist organizations as inherently entitled to represent their communities, it risks reproducing the exclusionary politics it seeks to overcome ([Neja, 2024](#)). The contribution of both Jawar and Abiy should therefore be evaluated by a common democratic standard: whether their political projects enable citizens to retain their identities, participate in national decision-making, hold governments accountable, and peacefully contest the country's constitutional future. Neither an Oromo leader's presence in national government nor a national unity slogan is sufficient evidence that this transformation has occurred.

8. The Political Movement of Oromo Nationalism Toward the Center

The movement of Oromo nationalism toward the center of Ethiopian politics should not be understood simply as a shift from opposition to government. It represents a deeper question about political ownership. For decades, Oromo nationalist politics frequently framed the central Ethiopian state as an institution from which Oromos needed protection or through which they sought self-determination. The rise of Oromo political actors to national leadership created an opportunity to change this relationship. The potential transformation has at least four dimensions.

8.1 From demanding recognition to shaping national institutions

Oromo political agency can influence Ethiopia's constitutional arrangements, public administration, language policy, economic priorities, security institutions, and national dialogue. This would represent a shift from seeking recognition by the state toward sharing responsibility for defining the state. Such participation must be substantive rather than symbolic. It requires institutions that allow diverse constituencies to influence policy and hold decision-makers accountable.

8.2 From competing nationalisms to negotiated citizenship

Oromo and Ethiopian identities need not be treated as mutually exclusive. A citizen can identify strongly with Oromia while participating in the wider Ethiopian political community. This possibility depends on constitutional guarantees that protect regional autonomy and cultural rights while ensuring equal citizenship across the country. It also requires a common political identity grounded in democratic principles rather than in the cultural history of any single community.

8.3 From political mobilization to democratic responsibility

The transition from resistance to governance requires more than access to state power. It demands a willingness to protect the rights of political opponents, accept electoral defeat, investigate abuses committed by one's own allies, and recognize that no movement possesses a permanent mandate to govern. Oromo nationalism would undermine its own democratic promise if it treated Oromo political dissent as betrayal. Ethiopian nationalism would do the same if it treated demands for regional autonomy as inherently disloyal.

8.4 From historical grievance to institutional reform

Historical grievances cannot be resolved solely through symbolic acknowledgment. They require credible mechanisms for addressing land disputes, political exclusion, cultural and linguistic inequalities, human rights violations, and uneven access to economic opportunity.

At the same time, historical memory should not become a permanent basis for collective blame. A sustainable political settlement must recognize past injustices while establishing institutions through which citizens can pursue their interests without inheriting compulsory political antagonisms. In these respects, Oromo ownership of Ethiopian nationalism would mean helping to build a state in which national belonging is not conditional on abandoning Oromo identity and in which Oromo identity is not used to restrict political disagreement.

9. Progressive Patriotism as a Framework for Reconciliation: Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its potential, Progressive Patriotism faces several important criticisms. The critiques presented by Benti Geleta Buli's sentiment analysis toward Jawar's proposal toward Progressive Patriotism emanates from his more positive tone toward constitutional patriotism. The central concern is that "progressive" remains inadequately defined and could become a rhetorical framework that preserves the status quo rather than resolving Ethiopia's political divisions. Constitutional patriotism is presented as a more constructive alternative grounded in shared constitutional values, democratic participation, and inclusive citizenship ([Benti Geleta Buli, 2024](#)).

Moges Zewdu Teshome's article published in 2024 argues that Jawar conflates multinational federalism, multicultural federalism, and a multicultural unitary state. He maintains that these are distinct institutional arrangements and that Ethiopia's problems cannot be resolved simply by democratizing an allegedly flawed constitutional structure. He advocates revisiting the constitutional order, strengthening an inclusive civic identity, protecting minorities, and building

a political community in which citizenship is not subordinated to ethnic affiliation ([Moges Zewdu Teshome, 2024](#)).

Professor Messay Kebede's analysis reveals a central debate in Ethiopian politics: Can Ethiopia reconcile ethnonational identity, regional self-government, democracy, and national unity without sacrificing one for another? His critique directly challenges the logical foundations of Progressive Patriotism. Prof. Messay argues that Jawar diagnoses the tension between ethnonationalism and national unity without adequately resolving it. He challenges Jawar's claim that ethnonationalism has become effectively irreversible, reasoning that political identities and institutions are historically constructed and can therefore change. Messay proposes democratic or civic nationalism as a more coherent alternative, arguing that inclusive democratic institutions can protect cultural diversity without making ethnic political sovereignty the organizing principle of the state ([Messay Kebede, 2024](#)).

In my critique published in 2024, I argued that Jawar Mohammed's distinction between "centripetal" and "centrifugal" political forces unfairly portrays ethnonationalist movements while underemphasizing the historical injustices, assimilationist policies, and authoritarian practices that gave rise to them. I questioned his proposed alternative of "Progressive Patriotism," arguing that appealing to right-wing Ethiopian nationalists by equating their historical responsibilities with those of ethnonationalist movements risks undermining the legitimate struggles and sacrifices of nations and nationalities, including the Oromo people. I also criticized his equivocal stance toward the Prosperity Party (PP), whose restrictions on democratic space and attempts to reshape historical narratives threaten genuine reconciliation and democratic progress ([Neja 2024](#)).

Although all the above positive critiques exists, Jawar's proposal of "**Progressive Patriotism**" expresses a desire to reconcile competing political commitments. Its institutional meaning, practical implementation, and relationship with ethnonationalism remain to be sufficiently defined. Let us view the feedback that need to be addressed to use *progressive patriotism* to be used as a tool for reconciliation of ethnic nationalism into all-inclusive Ethiopian multinationalism.

9.1 Conceptual ambiguity

The term *progressive* does not by itself establish which constitutional arrangements, political values, or economic policies the framework requires. Unless clearly defined, the concept can accommodate competing agendas without resolving their contradictions. A credible formulation should specify the role of democracy, constitutional rights, regional self-government, minority protection, and national institutions.

9.2 The danger of accommodating the status quo

Critics may interpret the concept as an attempt to persuade ethnonationalist constituencies to accept a more centralized Ethiopian state without sufficient institutional guarantees. This concern cannot be answered by insisting that national unity is desirable. It requires demonstrating that

regional autonomy and cultural rights will be protected in practice, including when regional governments oppose the federal government.

9.3 The unresolved relationship between ethnic and civic identity

Progressive Patriotism must explain how ethnic political identities can coexist with a common civic identity. It should not assume that the growth of Ethiopian patriotism will naturally reduce ethnonationalist identification. Nor should it assume that strong ethnic identification inevitably produces separatism or hostility toward other communities.

The more defensible position is that political identities are shaped by institutions, historical experience, public policy, and social interaction. Democratic arrangements can make multiple identities compatible; coercive arrangements can make them appear mutually exclusive.

9.4 The problem of political representation

Jawar's analysis of the Goobana narrative highlights the danger of treating a movement as the exclusive representative of a national community. Progressive Patriotism must apply the same principle to Oromo politics itself. No intellectual, party, or armed movement should claim that its own political program is synonymous with the interests of every Oromo. The Oromo people hold diverse views about independence, federalism, national identity, and the appropriate methods of political change. A democratic national project must preserve the freedom to debate these differences without delegitimizing citizens because of their political choices.

9.5 The limits of elite-driven reconciliation

A framework promoted by political elites cannot substitute for public participation. Its legitimacy depends on whether citizens can debate its meaning, challenge its assumptions, and influence its implementation. Progressive Patriotism would be more persuasive if it were developed through open political dialogue, constitutional deliberation, and inclusive public participation rather than presented as a completed solution requiring acceptance.

10. Constitutional Patriotism as a Practical Alternative or Complement

One possible way to clarify Progressive Patriotism is to connect it to constitutional patriotism: attachment to a political community based on shared constitutional principles, democratic institutions, equal citizenship, and fundamental rights rather than ethnic or cultural uniformity. Constitutional patriotism does not require citizens to abandon their cultural identities. Instead, it locates the common basis of political belonging in principles that apply equally to all citizens.

For Ethiopia, such a framework would require at least five commitments.

First, the Constitution must protect meaningful regional self-government and the rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples.

Second, federal and regional governments must be accountable through genuinely competitive political processes and an independent system of justice.

Third, minorities within regional states must enjoy equal citizenship, cultural rights, security, and political participation.

Fourth, national institutions must be accessible to citizens regardless of language, ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation, with appropriate protections for linguistic and cultural diversity.

Fifth, disputes over federal authority, regional boundaries, resources, and political representation must be resolved through credible constitutional procedures rather than coercion.

Constitutional patriotism is not a substitute for implementing these commitments. A constitution that formally recognizes rights but fails to protect them in practice cannot generate durable public trust.

The same criticism applies to Progressive Patriotism. Its success depends less on the appeal of its name than on whether it offers a credible institutional pathway toward democratic coexistence.

11. A Pragmatic Roadmap for Oromo Ownership of Ethiopian Nationalism

If Oromo nationalism is to help shape an inclusive Ethiopian national identity, several practical steps are necessary.

First, protect political pluralism within Oromo society. Independence advocates, federalists, supporters of the PP, and citizens who reject existing political organizations must be able to express their positions peacefully. No movement should claim an exclusive mandate to define Oromummaa or Oromo political interests.

Second, democratize multinational federalism. The federal system should be assessed not only by the autonomy it formally grants regional states but also by whether citizens can hold regional and federal authorities accountable. Regional autonomy without democratic accountability can produce local domination; centralization without regional guarantees can reproduce historical grievances.

Third, establish credible national dialogue. Dialogue must include significant political constituencies, affected communities, and relevant stakeholders. It should address the constitutional order, political competition, security, human rights, and the conditions required for peaceful participation. Dialogue cannot be credible if key participants are excluded or if its outcomes are predetermined.

Fourth, create effective mechanisms for accountability. Allegations of abuses by state security forces, armed opposition groups, and other actors require impartial investigation and appropriate remedies. The protection of civilians must not depend on their ethnicity or political affiliation.

Fifth, promote an inclusive national historical narrative. Ethiopia's history should be open to serious examination of imperial expansion, resistance, cultural contributions, political achievements, and past injustices. A shared national narrative need not require a single interpretation of every historical event. It should allow citizens to disagree about history while recognizing each other's equal political standing.

Sixth, define Progressive Patriotism institutionally. Jawar's framework should specify the relationship between regional self-government, national institutions, citizenship, and constitutional rights. Its practical value will depend on whether it offers safeguards against both coercive centralization and exclusionary regional politics.

Seventh, separate national unity from unconditional support for a government. Citizens should be able to oppose a prime minister, criticize the federal government, or demand constitutional change without being branded enemies of Ethiopia. Likewise, support for Oromo rights should not require unconditional loyalty to an Oromo political organization.

Finally, establish a democratic procedure for constitutional disagreement. The future relationship between Oromia and Ethiopia must remain open to peaceful political debate within the applicable constitutional and legal framework. Neither union nor independence should be treated as a conclusion that citizens are forbidden to question.

These measures would not eliminate political disagreement. Their purpose would be to make disagreement manageable through institutions rather than through recurrent violence.

12. Conclusion: Oromo Nationalism as a Force for Redefining Ethiopia

The historical relationship between Oromo nationalism and Ethiopian nationalism is often presented as a choice between two mutually exclusive political destinations. That framing overlooks the possibility that Oromo political agency could help redefine the Ethiopian state itself.

Jawar Mohammed's Progressive Patriotism attempts to articulate a framework in which ethnic identity and shared national belonging can coexist. His reflections on the Goobana hero-traitor narrative further suggest that political movements face a difficult transition when they move from resistance toward governance: they must reconsider inherited narratives without erasing the historical experiences that gave those narratives meaning.

Abiy Ahmed's rise to power created an opportunity to translate Oromo political mobilization into democratic transformation at the national level. Yet the subsequent conflicts and disputes over centralization, regional autonomy, and political exclusion demonstrate that symbolic representation does not automatically resolve structural problems.

The experience also reinforces a central lesson of my earlier critique of coercive policies toward ethnonationalism: attempts to weaken ethnic political identities without addressing the grievances and institutional concerns that sustain them can generate a self-reinforcing cycle of resistance and repression.

Progressive Patriotism can contribute to a different future only if it becomes more than a rhetorical compromise. It must be grounded in constitutional democracy, meaningful regional self-government, equal citizenship, accountability, and the freedom of citizens to disagree with political leaders and movements.

Ultimately, Oromo ownership of Ethiopian nationalism should mean neither Oromo domination of Ethiopia nor the assimilation of Oromos into a pre-existing national identity. It should mean equal participation in defining the state and its future.

An Ethiopian nationalism that belongs equally to Oromos must recognize Oromia as a legitimate political community, protect Oromo language and culture, acknowledge historical grievances, and ensure that Oromo citizens can shape national institutions without surrendering their identity.

Likewise, an Oromo nationalism committed to democratic freedom must recognize that no party, intellectual, or armed movement can permanently monopolize the definition of Oromo interests. The Oromo people must retain the freedom to choose among political alternatives, including independence, federalism, and constitutional reform.

The most important question is therefore not whether Oromo nationalism should disappear into Ethiopian nationalism or remain permanently opposed to it. It is whether both can be transformed through democratic institutions so that neither requires the political subordination of the other.

The future of Ethiopian nationalism will depend on whether the country can build a political community in which unity is freely sustained rather than coercively imposed, ethnic identities are protected rather than demonized, and national citizenship is shared rather than monopolized.

Oromo nationalism's most consequential contribution to Ethiopia may ultimately be its capacity to help transform Ethiopian nationalism from an inherited claim of state authority into a genuinely shared project of democratic citizenship.

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