

USING THE THEORY OF PROTRACTED SOCIAL CONFLICT AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE TO UNRAVEL THE TIGRAY-ETHIOPIAN WAR

*Dr. Frederick Appiah Afriyie, Research Center for Analysis and Security
Studies (RECASS), Ghana*

*Frank Boateng Asomani, National Commission on Small Arms and Light
Weapons, Ghana*

Abstract

Ethiopia, Africa's oldest independent nation and a key player in the Horn of Africa's security, has undergone significant political and economic transformations. Despite emerging as a regional powerhouse, Ethiopia faces a complex ethnic landscape with diverse demographic groups. The historically influential Tigray region, plunged into a civil conflict in November 2020, and involved ethno-regional militias, the federal government, and Eritrean forces. This conflict stems from historical tensions, including the autocratic rule of Meles Zenawi and the dominance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, who heralded for fostering unity, took office in 2018 but faced escalating ethnic tensions. Postponed elections and federal interventions fueled discontent, leading to the outbreak of the Tigray War in November 2020. Abiy's military offensive, initially portrayed as a targeted operation, escalated into a brutal conflict, drawing international concern. Accusations of civilian mistreatment and Eritrean involvement were initially denied but later acknowledged by the Ethiopian government. The Tigray War underscores the challenges of achieving ethnic harmony and political stability in Ethiopia. This paper analyzes the Tigray War in Ethiopia, tracing its origins from the 19th century to the present, examining its consequences. The article specifically employs the Protracted Social Conflict and Structural Violence Theories to explain the conflict.

Introduction

Ethiopia, Africa's oldest independent nation with a population of approximately 115 million, has played a crucial role in ensuring territorial security in the Horn of Africa (Afriyie et al., 2023). Despite the political and economic challenges faced in the latter half of the twentieth century, the country has emerged as one of the leading economic and political influencers on the continent (Afriyie et al., 2023). Below is a map showing Ethiopia's Tigray region.

Figure 1

A map depicting the Tigray region of Ethiopia, emphasizing significant cities.
Associated Press



Source: United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

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On the flip side, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is located in eastern Africa and comprises nine national regional states (Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Gambella, and Harari) as well as two administrative councils: Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa (Evennett, 2022). As per the 2007 census, the main demographic groups in Ethiopia consist of the Oromos and the Amharas, making up 34.5% and 26.9% of the population, respectively. Somalis make up 6.2%, followed by Tigrays at 6.1%, Sidamas at 4.0%, Gurages at 2.5%, Welaytas at 2.3%, Hadiyas at 1.7%, Afars at 1.7%, and Gamos at 1.5%. The remaining 13% includes other diverse ethnicities (Pellet, 2021). Additionally, Ethiopia's ethnic diversity, as identified in the 2007 census, results from its position as a geographic crossroads for migrants fleeing conflict, along with the direct repercussions of wars and instability in neighboring nations. This interaction between migration trends and demographic make-up demonstrates how external influences play a crucial role in shaping national identities and social frameworks in Ethiopia (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019).

However, Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa, has been grappling with a civil conflict in its northernmost region, Tigray, since November 2020. This region borders Eritrea, as depicted in the map above (Neuman, 2021). This conflict, involving ethno-regional militias, the federal government, and the Eritrean military, has drawn the attention of humanitarian groups and external entities. Despite being an ethnic minority, Tigray has historically been politically influential, particularly through the dominance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) - the main political party representing the region. Meles Zenawi, a Tigrayan soldier-politician, governed Ethiopia autocratically from 1991 until his death in 2012, overseeing a period of rapid development. Despite securing aid from the United States and the United Kingdom and facilitating peace

negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan in 2011, his regime failed to prevent a brutal war with Eritrea. Additionally, it marginalized larger ethnic groups, such as the Somali, Oromo, and Amhara, and solidified a centralized autocracy (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). After Meles Zenawi's death, the TPLF continued to govern Ethiopia using a similar approach. However, the Tigrayan control of the national government came to an end in 2018. Following protests, particularly from the Oromo population, the government decided to appoint Abiy Ahmed Ali as the new Prime Minister (Schemm, 2018). Abiy was widely praised by both international actors and Ethiopians as the new beacon of hope for peace and ethnic harmony in the country (Schemm, 2018). Early in his premiership, Abiy committed to repairing fractured relationships between Ethiopia's ethnic groups and fostering a sense of unity (Schemm, 2018). In 2019, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in resolving conflicts at the Eritrean border and swiftly dismantling domestic restrictions on certain political freedoms.

Nevertheless, within a year, the state of ethnic relations in Ethiopia once again began to worsen. The numerous postponements of long-promised national elections and the announcement of a prolongation of Abiy Ahmed's initial term as prime minister in June 2020 elicited strong disapproval from Tigrayan leadership ("Ethiopian Parliament Allows PM Abiy to Stay in Office beyond Term," 2020). The decision of the Tigray State Council to conduct local elections in defiance of federal directives escalated tensions even further (Marks & Dahir, 2020). Leading up to the regional elections, which ultimately solidified the TPLF's popularity, Tigrayan leaders cautioned that any intervention by the federal government would be seen as a "declaration of war" (Tronvoll, 2024). After the TPLF's triumph in the regional elections, Abiy accused Tigrayan forces of attacking a federal military camp with the intent of looting weapons. It soon became evident that the confrontational political rhetoric in the fall of 2020 marked the initial warning signs of what would eventually evolve into a brutal civil war.

On November 4, 2020, Abiy Ahmed directed Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) soldiers to move northward to initiate a military campaign called the Mekelle Offensive in Tigray, named after the capital city of the region (Burke, 2020; Marks, 2020). The intensity of the offensive heightened in the subsequent months as Tigrayan troops (i.e. Tigray Defence Force (TDF) intensified their military, retaliation (Mabera, 2023). This conflict gradually evolved into a civil war, commonly referred to as the Tigray War. Abiy initially portrayed the offensive as a targeted mission against individuals within the TPLF leadership. A communication blackout, implemented at the commencement of the conflict, hindered the flow of information regarding ground conditions. Nonetheless, by December 2020, both media outlets and United Nations officials started expressing apprehensions about the mistreatment of civilians, with a particular focus on those belonging to the ethnic Tigrayan community (Anna, 2020; El-Mofty & Hadero, 2021; Solomon, 2020). Amid escalating accusations, Abiy's administration dismissed requests for mediation from the African Union (AU). Ethiopia's neighboring country and former adversary, Eritrea, which had previously engaged in a war with Ethiopia during the Zenawi regime, aligned itself with the Ethiopian government early in the conflict. Despite months of denial regarding their presence, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed acknowledged in the spring of 2021 that Eritrean troops were indeed involved in the fighting in Tigray (Reid, 2022). Given this context, the research article utilizes the Protracted Social Conflict Theory and the Structural Violence Theory to elucidate the reasons behind the existing conflict in Ethiopia and explore potential resolutions.

Methodology

In order to thoroughly understand the Tigray-Ethiopian Conflict, this research utilized a literature review approach, which involved examining existing research articles, online resources, books, and reports from international organizations related to the conflict. The study did not incorporate any primary data sources.

The information collected was analyzed qualitatively in an objective manner to explore the fundamental causes of the Tigray-Ethiopian Conflict. According to Morris (2009), using a wide variety of sources facilitates a rich qualitative analysis, enabling a comprehensive and detailed investigation of the phenomenon. This approach provides an in-depth exploration of the subject being examined.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on two main theoretical frameworks: The Protracted Social Conflict Theory, which Edward Azar developed in the early 1970s, and the Structural Violence Theory, which was first introduced by Norwegian Sociologist Johan Galtung in his 1969 article “Violence, Peace, and Peace Studies” (Dilts et al., 2012; Azar, 1990). The Theory of Protracted Social Conflict focuses on the dynamics of social conflicts, particularly in divided societies. Azar's theory posits that protracted social conflicts are characterized by deep-rooted societal divisions, often along ethnic, religious, or cultural lines. These conflicts are not just about material issues but involve fundamental identity, values, and existential concerns. According to Azar, “protracted social conflicts are driven by structural, historical, and cultural factors that create and perpetuate grievances among different social groups” (Azar, 1990). The theory emphasizes the importance of examining underlying causes rather than just immediate triggers for understanding and resolving conflicts.

In his work, Edward Azar introduced the concept of protracted social conflict theory, which explains how persistent and sometimes violent conflicts arise from the prolonged struggle of ethnic groups to fulfill their fundamental needs, such as security, recognition, representation in political institutions, and economic freedoms (Azar, 1990). Ethnic groups typically form identity groups around individuals who share similar interests in their pursuit of meeting these needs. Such conflicts are often fueled by deeply ingrained hatred based on race, religion, tribe, and culture. Vulnerable groups, in particular, are haunted by the fear of

suppression or persecution, which only strengthens their underlying fear of extinction. Azar further notes that ethnic-based divisions and associated threats often arise from the domination of government institutions and structures by a single ethnic group or an alliance of elites who refuse access to opportunities and the ability to meet the basic human needs of the remaining population (Azar, 1990). According to the protracted social conflict theory, violent conflict can be attributed to four primary conditions: the deprivation of human needs, the role of government, international connections, and communal aspects.

In the Tigrayan conflict, several underlying factors contributed to the violent and protracted social conflict. One such factor was the communal aspect, which served as a unifying force for the TPLF. According to Fisher (2001), humans tend to form identity groups to meet their developmental needs. In Ethiopia, politically dominant groups emerged due to a divide and rule system in which certain groups were given preferential treatment over others. Additionally, a history of competition and animosity between communities further fueled the desire for ethnic-based political groups. These factors were present in Ethiopia even prior to the 2018 declaration of war, as the country had previously engaged in a conflict with Eritrea from 1998 to 2000 (Melesse, 2020). The communal aspect was particularly significant in Ethiopia due to the government's inability to meet the basic needs of the population, which resulted in many individuals relying heavily on their social groups. This helps explain why the TPLF maintained a dominant position within the ruling coalition from 1991 to 2018 by forming alliances with four other ethno-regional parties.

According to Melesse (2020), two preconditions for the recent unrest in Ethiopia were the deprivation of human needs and the role of the government. These preconditions were exacerbated by the sidelining of TPLF leaders by Abiy Ahmed after the 2018 election and the postponement of national elections by the federal government in 2020. For 27 years, from 1991 to 2018, the TPLF was the dominant political entity in Ethiopia, with its members heading all of the country's military and intelligence agencies before 2018. Following their victory

in the 1991 war, the TPLF government disbanded the old Ethiopian army. It converted its soldiers into the Ethiopian army, giving them political and military power, which they used to control Ethiopia's economy, natural resources, and foreign investments. The TPLF also controlled the selection process of religious leaders, which they used as a means of social control.

However, the TPLF's authority was challenged by widespread protests in 2018, and they did not see Abiy Ahmed, a member of the Oromo ethnic group, as a threat to their dominance because the Oromo had historically played a subservient role to the TPLF, despite being the largest tribe in Ethiopia. Upon taking office, Abiy Ahmed initiated anti-corruption measures that significantly impacted the economic power of Tigrayan leaders. Furthermore, the new administration instituted economic reforms, such as privatizing state-owned enterprises that individuals from Tigray primarily controlled. Additionally, the prime minister undertook security sector reforms, which involved replacing TPLF-affiliated leaders with new military and intelligence chiefs. According to a report by the Foreign Policy Council, there has been an increase in ethnic-based conflicts in all regional states except Tigray since TPLF lost control of the federal government in 2020. However, human rights observers argue that evidence suggests that many of these attacks were orchestrated and financed by those disadvantaged by Abiy's regime. It is worth noting that the federal government reduced revenue allocation to the TPLF region, which was deemed an act of war by TPLF leaders. The series of measures implemented by the prime minister since 2018 align with the government's role as a precursor to prolonged conflict, per the protracted social conflict theory.

According to Galtung, structural violence results from the unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities within society, leading to systematic disadvantages for certain groups (Dilts et al., 2012). This form of violence is often rooted in economic, political, and cultural structures that contribute to social injustices and marginalization (Farmer et al., 2006). The theory of structural violence underscores the need for systemic changes in social,

economic, and political structures to address the root causes of inequality and promote a more just and equitable society (Dilts et al., 2012; Farmer et al., 2006). This perspective recognizes the importance of understanding the broader context in which violence occurs and advocates for interventions that target structural inequalities to achieve lasting social change.

The theory further emphasizes that violence is not limited to physical harm but can also result from social structures or systems that prevent people from fulfilling their basic needs. This view is supported by Weigert (2008), who suggests that structural violence can be seen in the unequal distribution of power and resources in society. Malesevic (2016) notes that structural violence can occur without a clear perpetrator or starting point. Examples of structural violence include classism, tribalism, hate crimes, and police violence. Galtung identified four categories of structural violence. The first category is characterized by structurally conditioned poverty, while the second category includes poverty and other factors that deprive people of basic human needs (Weigert, 2008). Repression is the third category of structural violence, which is responsible for the deprivation of human rights, while the fourth category is alienation, which can result in the deprivation of higher needs. These forms of violence are deeply ingrained in societal and governmental structures, significantly harming individuals and communities.

Using the structural theory to analyze the Tigrayan conflict reveals the continued existence of the three categories of structural violence present before 2018. The conflict is said to have started in 2005 when demonstrators protesting the TPLF government were killed in Addis Ababa, indicating deep-seated disenfranchisement and lack of representation among Ethiopian ethnic groups (Melesse, 2020). This unrest was fueled by the fact that the TPLF region and Tigrayans, in general, had dominated government positions since 1991, despite comprising only 6% of the population. This resulted in a sense of marginalization among the larger ethnic groups, such as the Oromo and Amhara, which comprise 34.5% and 26.9% of the population, respectively. The resulting ethnic divisions

were exacerbated by difficulties in meeting basic needs, which intensified feelings of marginalization.

Since coming into power, the TPLF has been involved in multiple categories of structural violence. The third category of structural violence is exhibited in the TPLF's leaders' behavior of denying other autonomous regions fair and equal representation. Furthermore, the TPLF has long been accused of not treating its allies as equals. According to one leader from the EPRDF, who was an ally of the TPLF, members of his party felt that the TPLF treated them as subservient entities. Other leaders made similar remarks, who argued that leaders from Somali and Afar regions were not considered competent or worthy enough to join the TPLF. These actions and subjugation of other ethnic groups led to the 2018 protests that resulted in a new regime coming into power. The ongoing violent conflict between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF army has exposed victims to the first, second, and third types of structural violence. As per a United Nations Human Rights Commission report, both parties have obstructed humanitarian access and imposed a communication blackout in the affected areas (*Provide Unhindered Access to Whole of Tigray to Protect Civilians, Bachelet Urges Ethiopia*, 2020). This lack of access to essential resources for the civilians affected by the conflict has resulted in challenges to fulfilling their fundamental human needs, such as healthcare, food, and safe shelter, which falls under the first category of structural violence. Moreover, the destruction of communication systems has resulted in a sense of isolation and disconnection from other regions, which is an example of the second category of structural violence. Additionally, soldiers have been reported engaging in sexual violence to intimidate civilians into providing critical information, which falls under the second, third, and fourth categories of structural violence, according to the Office of the High Commissioner Human Rights (*Provide Unhindered Access to Whole of Tigray to Protect Civilians, Bachelet Urges Ethiopia*, 2020).

The Origin of Eritrea's Participation in the Tigray Conflict:

Historical Roots and Contemporary Dynamics

To address this conflict, it is essential to revisit the 1970s when the TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front jointly confronted the Derg regime. Despite their differences, Meles Zenawi and Isaias Afwerki, the leaders of the two rebel groups, joined forces and orchestrated a final offensive in 1991, successfully capturing Addis Ababa and Asmara. Following this victory, Meles assumed the role of Prime Minister in Ethiopia, while Isaias took control in Eritrea, leading it to independence. However, the relationship between these two leaders soured over time, reaching a critical point during the border conflict of 1998–2000, which resulted in the loss of over 100,000 lives (Afriyie et al., 2023; Neuman, 2021).

In 2018, the TPLF were forced to relinquish control in Ethiopia, marking a significant shift as outlined by Afriyie et al. (2023). The party had long been the dominant force in the government, but following widespread protests, the ruling coalition opted for a new prime minister. Seizing the opportunity presented by Abiy Ahmed's departure from his predecessors' perspectives on Eritrea, President Isaias took advantage of this shift. Abiy was invited to Asmara, where he was warmly welcomed by Eritrean public in celebration of the new prime minister. In reciprocation, Abiy extended a similar enthusiastic reception to Isaias in Addis Ababa. The formalization of their relationship occurred in September 2018 when the two leaders signed a formal treaty in Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, their bilateral relationship flourished, with Abiy and Isaias maintaining regular communication. Over a span of just over two years, they engaged in nine official visits to each other's capitals and participated in joint missions to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Their final meetings took place at separate military bases. On July 18, 2020, Abiy conducted an inspection of troops and military equipment at Sawa, Eritrea's primary military training base. Later, on October

12, 2020, Isaias visited Ethiopia's Bishoftu airbase, home to the country's air force (Afriyie et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, early in the conflict, there were reports suggesting Eritrea's involvement in the war. On November 29, 2020, The Times conveyed assertions from the TPLF, stating that Eritrea was actively participating in the conflict by deploying troops against them. However, it emphasized the challenge of verifying such claims due to the government's interruption of communications to Tigray. This disruption made it impossible to independently confirm allegations of atrocities committed by both sides. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission accused militias associated with the TPLF of massacring hundreds of labourers from the neighboring Amhara region. It is important to note that Amhara and Tigray have long been entangled in territorial disputes spanning decades.

In February 2021, Amnesty International released a report that brought attention to the participation of Eritrean forces in the events that took place in the Ethiopian city of Axum, Tigray, in late November 2020. The report outlined various instances of violations of human rights and humanitarian laws, attributing the actions, such as the killing of numerous civilians, to the Eritrean troops. Similarly, the *'Human rights and democracy: 2020'* report, published by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in July 2021, acknowledged "persistent and credible reports" indicating the involvement of Eritrean troops in the conflict in the Tigray region since November 2020 (Evennett, 2022). The document also highlighted concerns about potential breaches of international law, including violations of international human rights law, associated with these reported incidents.

Moreover, in March 2021, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia acknowledged the participation of Eritrean troops in the conflict, a reversal of his previous denials spanning several months. According to him, Eritrean forces had entered the Ethiopian border due to concerns about potential attacks by TPLF forces. Despite this, he contended that the Eritrean troops had assured a

withdrawal once Ethiopia's military gained control over the border. Professor Richard Reid (2022) of the University of Oxford characterized Eritrea's potential involvement as a "risky strategy," suggesting that it could be perceived as an opportunity for Eritrea to further its interests by fostering a weakened and disunited Ethiopia, potentially paving the way for a more significant role for Eritrea in the region (Evennett, 2022).

However, he contended that this strategy could result in Eritrea becoming more isolated and facing a convergence of Ethiopian adversaries and domestic opposition that pose an existential threat to the Eritrean government itself (Evennett, 2022). The involvement of Eritrean forces has generated pressure from various international organizations. In March 2021, Reuters disclosed that Mark Lowcock, the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, had urged the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Ethiopia. Addressing the United Nations Security Council, he purportedly emphasized that they should not be allowed to persist in their destructive campaign before departing. UN Secretary General António Guterres similarly called for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray.

In a letter dated April 16, 2021, directed to the UN Security Council, the Eritrean permanent representative to the UN conveyed that due to the subsiding imminent threat, Eritrea and Ethiopia, at the highest diplomatic levels, had agreed to initiate the withdrawal of Eritrean forces and the simultaneous redeployment of Ethiopian contingents along the international boundary. However, it seemed that this withdrawal did not take place, and by June 2021, the Ethiopian representative to the United Nations was reported as expressing that Eritrean troops would "certainly depart soon" (Reid, 2022). In July 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council endorsed a resolution urging the immediate cessation of all violations in the Tigray region and called for the prompt and verifiable withdrawal of Eritrean troops.

The Inception of the Tigray People's Liberation Front

When Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, Selassie led the opposition against this colonial imperialism and was exiled in May 1936 after failed attempts to resist control. The British and Ethiopian troops recaptured Addis Ababa nearly five years ago, and Selassie was reinstated as Emperor. Emperor Selassie consolidated his power and legitimized his rulership by formulating and enacting a new constitution in 1955. A section of the army in December 1960 challenged his sovereignty after capturing parts of Addis Ababa (Searcy, 2021). Signaling the end of Selassie's reign, the military was reliably assisted by loyalist factions of the army. By 1974, the military was well emboldened by the high unemployment rate, famine, and slow administration of the state to carry out government topples. Finally, Selassie's monarchy fell, and a military junta reigned under what was known as the Coordinating Committee of Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army (Searcy, 2021). Within three months, the new regime (Derg) had not only rooted out monarchical traces but proceeded to arrest the rank and file of the Emperor. Under the military leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam, Ethiopia had now been remodeled into a Marxist-Leninist State. After gaining full power, he launched a Red Terror campaign and eliminated political opponents through imprisonment or summary execution. Behind the Ethiopia First motto, Mengistu was adamantly opposed to viewing any ethnic or regional division as a threat to Ethiopia's unity and interests. Ethiopia First shattered any optimism that Mengistu would address the Tigrayans' condition, according to Kim Searcy (2021), and various ethno-nationalist groups eager to take up arms against the Derg, arose in the 1970s.

The Tigray University Student Union (TUSA) was formed in the early 1970s, urging parliamentarians, businessmen, and other Tigray leaders to improve Tigray's position. In September 1974, the student body established the Tigray National Organization (TNO). As an armed group, the TNO was also changed to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in February 1975. The TNO was founded by seven university students who prepared a mission statement to "create a democratic Ethiopia in which the equality of all nationalities and

ethnicities is acknowledged” through armed conflict (Searcy, 2021). During its early armed resistance, the TPLF fought and beat two competing factions in the province: a significant group of the former aristocracy (who were keen on regaining control of the lands) in the west and the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party, a student-led socialist movement in the east. By 1979, the TPLF was Tigray’s only significant opposition movement, opposing Addis Ababa’s centralization aspirations. The Front’s ideology and agenda were based on nationalism and self-determination. Ultranationalists in the TPLF attempted to secede from the Ethiopian nation-state early on, but this was a minority position that was rapidly abandoned (Searcy, 2021).

Historical Trajectories of Ethiopia from the Nineteenth Century to the Present:

Background

First and foremost, from the 19th century to mid-20th century, during the 19th century, European powers engaged in a progressive colonization of the African continent, except Ethiopia. Ethiopia managed to maintain its independence, except for a brief period of Italian occupation between 1935 and 1941 (Pellet, 2021). Mussolini’s Italy faced strong opposition during this occupation, eventually leading to their defeat in 1941 with the help of the British. The current borders of Ethiopia are a relatively recent development, as the historical version of Ethiopia was only about one-third of its present size. This earlier Ethiopia was limited to Addis Ababa and Asmara highlands, including Tigray. It wasn’t until the late 19th century that Emperor Menelik II’s conquests led to Ethiopia colonizing peripheral regions that had previously been independent sultanates or kingdoms. Over time, these areas were gradually absorbed into Ethiopia, eventually establishing the country’s present-day borders by 1941. In 1962, Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia, but it later gained independence in 1993. The highland region of Ethiopia has a rich history of diversity, with a federation of

kingdoms operating under the sovereignty of an emperor called King of Kings. However, it wasn't until Menelik II's reign that the process of establishing a centralized state began. Menelik II and his successor, Haile Selassie, had a strong desire to modernize the country, which led to the imposition of centralism, dominated by the Amharic culture and language (Pellet, 2021).

In the period spanning 1970 to 1991, Ethiopia underwent various operations and events, including a significant event in 1974. During this year, the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, who had been in power since 1930, was brought to an end by the DERG military junta, which took control of the revolution. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam quickly assumed control of the junta and imposed a Marxist dictatorship on the country, which lasted for nearly two decades and followed the same pattern of authoritarian centralism (Pellet, 2021). Amidst the authoritarian rule, regional nationalist movements were formed, with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) leading the resistance and eventually toppling the regime in 1991. The TPLF took the lead in 1989 and established the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which was a coalition of four parties: the TPLF, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (ODPO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEDPM) (*Le Fédéralisme Ethnolinguistique En Éthiopie*, 2016).

Moreover, between 1991 and 2018, with a particular emphasis on 1991, the EPRDF came into power after rebel forces took over from Mengistu. The new EPRDF government departed from the centralized policy that had been implemented for many years and established the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. In 1994, the new constitution restructured Ethiopia's administrative divisions, creating eight regional states and two autonomous cities with regional state status, namely Addis Ababa and Dirre Daoua. Meles Zenawi, a leader from the Tigray ethnic group, recognized the failure of the centralizing and authoritarian approach centered around the dominant Amharas ethnic group and

decentralized the country into a federal republic, promoting the idea of managing unity in diversity (Pellet, 2021). Since 1994, the EPRDF coalition has consistently won elections. The concept of federalism in Ethiopia is based on ethnicity and language. Each regional state is named after an ethnic group instead of a geographical location, except for the southern regional state called Southern Peoples, Nationalities and Nations (*Le Fédéralisme Ethnolinguistique En Éthiopie*, 2016). Although none of the regional states are ethnically uniform, the government aimed to create a federation of peoples by redrawing the administrative map. This approach may be viewed as artificial. Additionally, the 1994 constitution grants regional states the right to self-determination and secession.

The TPLF took charge of political life following the overthrow of the communist dictatorship in 1991 due to its significant role in it. Despite allowing other ethnic parties of the EPRDF to take some positions gradually over the past decade, the TPLF remained dominant. However, they ensured they retained control over the security forces, police, and army, mostly Tigrayan soldiers. This led to tension with representatives of other ethnic groups, as Tigrayans make up only 6 percent of Ethiopia's population. In 2012, Meles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, passed away. Zenawi had been in power since 1991. After his passing, his Deputy Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, took over as the new Prime Minister. Notably, the new leader belonged to the Wolaytta ethnic group, which illustrates the TPLF's aim of handing over power to other ethnic parties (*Le Fédéralisme Ethnolinguistique En Éthiopie*, 2016).

In addition, from 2018 – 2020, Abiy Ahmed came to power, and political and ethnic tensions escalated. The government headed by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn faced increasing protests driven by demands from the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups, who comprise most of the population. The protests were met with severe repression, and a state of emergency was declared in February 2018. Hailemariam Desalegn stepped down as Prime Minister on February 15. On April 2, parliament selected Abiy Ahmed, who is of Oromo and

Amhara ancestry and is a Pentecostal Christian, as the new Prime Minister. Abiy Ahmed aims to unite Ethiopians and govern the country in a centralized way to reduce ethnic tensions. However, this approach is reminiscent of pre-1991 centralist politics (Pellet, 2021). After Abiy Ahmed came to power, tensions between the new Prime Minister and the TPLF began to escalate inexorably.

Abiy Ahmed, in July 2018, agreed to a Peace, Friendship, and Comprehensive Cooperation deal with Eritrean President Isaias Afewerqi, which ended the ongoing state of war between the two nations. His efforts toward peace led to him being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize a few months later. As part of the agreement, Addis Ababa recognized the borders established in 2002 as per the Algiers agreements without any conditions. However, the peace treaty is concise and lacks any mention of the specifics or methods for creating the new border (Marsai, 2021). Therefore, it implies that certain territories north of Tigray will eventually need to be returned to Eritrea. Towards the end of 2018, several military and high-ranking government officials, known as the old guard, were taken into custody and charged with corruption and human rights violations. The TPLF perceived this action as a deliberate effort to target and undermine the Tigrayan elite.

In December 2019, the EPRDF alliance underwent reorganization and was renamed the Prosperity Party (P.P.). The new party was formed by merging the four former EPRDF parties with other parties from the five regional States that were previously allied with the EPRDF but not part of it. Abiy Ahmed aimed to unite the nation and move away from the previous state-controlled economic policies by introducing liberal economic reforms, thereby giving more space to the private sector. However, increasing internal tensions led to the departure of the TPLF from the reorganized coalition. The TPLF believed that the federal policy they had implemented since 1991 was a better way to handle the country's deep ethnic divisions ("Ethiopia's Tigray Crisis: Debretsion Gebremichael, the Man at the Heart of the Conflict," 2020). Additionally, the TPLF disagreed with the Prosperity Party's liberal economic outlook, as they preferred an approach to

economic development based on state intervention, which they believed had contributed to Ethiopia's economic growth (Yibeltal, 2019). Due to the COVID pandemic, the government postponed the August 2020 elections. However, the TPLF viewed this decision as a strategy by Abiy Ahmed to retain power, and they refused to accept it ("National Elections Report" 2021). Despite the postponement, the Tigray region held its election, which the TPLF and its leader Debretsion Gebremichael won by a significant margin. This created a situation where both sides considered each other illegitimate. The Addis Ababa government rejected the Tigray election results, and the TPLF claimed that the central government had exceeded its official term. Consequently, relations between the central government and Tigray leadership deteriorated, with TPLF representatives no longer participating in parliamentary proceedings. The mounting tensions eventually led to armed conflict erupting in early November 2020.

From 2021 to 2023, significant events related to Eritrean soldiers and human rights violations occurred. In 2021, Cable News Network (CNN) uncovered an alleged massacre during a religious festival in Dengelat. According to eyewitnesses, Eritrean soldiers shot at a church during a service, resulting in the deaths of priests, women, families, and over 20 schoolchildren (Arvanitidis et al., 2021).

Additionally, Amnesty International released a report revealing that Eritrean forces killed numerous unarmed civilians in Axum in November 2020. These killings were made through indiscriminate shelling, shooting, and extrajudicial means, which Amnesty International believes could be classified as a crime against humanity ("Eritrean Troops Massacre Hundreds of Civilians in Axum, Ethiopia," 2021). In 2021, Aaron Pellish and Laura Smith-Spark reported that the U.S. Secretary of State, Blinken, has called for the withdrawal of Eritrean and Ethiopian regional forces from the Tigray region, along with a cessation of human rights violations and violence. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, has also urged an independent investigation into the

alleged possible war crimes committed in Tigray following CNN's report on the massacre in Dengelat (Kennedy, 2021). Additionally, Blinken used the term "ethnic cleansing" during a Congressional committee hearing to describe the human rights abuses happening in western Tigray, stating that the situation is unacceptable (Hansler, 2021). Eleanor Pickston and Nima Elbagir (2021) reported in a recent United Nations document that Ethiopia is on the brink of a severe famine. The Tigray region is currently witnessing over 350,000 individuals grappling with "acute food insecurity" at levels considered catastrophic, as highlighted in the report (Elbagir & Pickston, 2021). Abiy secured another 5-year term in Ethiopia's first multi-party election in 16 years, and the election board confirmed his landslide victory a month later (Endeshaw, 2021). Following the retake of Mekelle by Tigrayan forces, the Ethiopian government declares an immediate and unilateral ceasefire ("Ethiopia Declares Ceasefire as Rebels Retake Tigray Capital," 2021). Amnesty International released a report outlining widespread cases of rape and sexual violence carried out by members of the ENDF, the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF), and other aligned special forces and militia groups ("Ethiopia: Troops and Militia Rape, Abduct Women and Girls in Tigray Conflict – New Report," 2021). In response to their involvement in the ongoing Tigray crisis, the Biden administration-imposed sanctions on Eritrea's military and its sole political party. It designated the EDF and People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) through an executive order. The government has imposed penalties on two people and two organizations connected to the groups (Hansler, 2021). An investigation by CNN reveals that the government used Ethiopian Airlines, the primary commercial airline in Ethiopia, to transport weapons to and from Eritrea during the war (Al Jazeera Staff, 2021).

The Attorney General of Ethiopia, Gedion Timotheos, declared a state of emergency after Tigrayan forces claimed to have taken control of key cities Dessie and Kombolcha. Two days after Abiy urged citizens to defend themselves against the TPLF by taking up arms, this decision was made (Feleke et al., 2021).

Abiy declared that he would personally lead his country's soldiers on the front lines against the advancing rebel fighters, saying in a statement on Twitter, "Beginning tomorrow, I will go to the war front to lead the defense forces personally." (Feleke & CNN, 2021). He urges citizens to "lead the country with sacrifice" and join him (CNN Editorial Research, 2022). An airstrike on a Tigray camp for internally displaced persons in 2022 resulted in the death of 56 people and injury of 30 others (Dawit, 2022). Following 14 months of the war, President Biden urged Ethiopian leader Abiy to negotiate a ceasefire (Kottasová & Pokharel, 2022). As a result, the Ethiopian government declared a cessation of hostilities to allow food aid to reach Tigray. The Tigrayan forces agreed to honor the ceasefire, but only if adequate aid was delivered to the region within a reasonable timeframe (CNN Editorial Research, 2022).

The U.N. World Food Program reported that trucks carrying over 500 metric tons of food and nutrition supplies entered Tigray for the first time since mid-December. The convoy was expected to reach Mekelle soon to assist communities on the brink of starvation (Feleke & Kolirin, 2022). The Ethiopian administration established a team headed by Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen to hold talks with the TPLF (Harter, 2022). Despite a three-month ceasefire, fighting between Ethiopian government troops and Tigrayan forces restarted (Feleke, 2022). The TPLF announced its willingness to adhere to a prompt ceasefire and acknowledge a peace process led by the African Union to conclude the conflict with federal forces, stating that they were prepared to comply with an immediate and jointly decided end to the fighting to establish a favorable environment (Harter, 2022). In 2023, Blinken visited Ethiopia, and during his trip, he urged Abiy to take responsibility for the atrocities committed by all parties involved in the conflict. Shortly after his visit, Blinken declared that the U.S. government had officially concluded that the armed forces of all sides had committed war crimes during the conflict (Stigant, 2023)

Role of the US, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Tigray-Ethiopia conflict

The Tigray-Ethiopia conflict has seen active involvement from the United States, notably in the negotiation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA). The U.S. played a key role in facilitating talks and aimed to establish a cohesive regional framework to address the crisis in Ethiopia (Demissie, 2023). Moreover, the United States expressed approval for the enduring peace agreement between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), according to a Saudi Gazette report (*Saudi Arabia Welcomes Peace Agreement in Tigray Region of Ethiopia*, 2022). This engagement reflects the U.S.'s commitment to pursuing a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the region. Nevertheless, this tranquility did not occur in isolation. The United States imposed sanctions on the Ethiopian and Eritrean Defense Forces, along with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) ("US Says All Sides Committed War Crimes in Ethiopia Conflict," 2023). Additionally, Ethiopia's designation as a beneficiary under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a program providing trade benefits to qualifying sub-Saharan African nations, was revoked. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted that individuals from the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces were involved in war crimes during the conflict, underscoring the imperative for justice and accountability (Lee, 2023; "US Says All Sides Committed War Crimes in Ethiopia Conflict" 2023). The United States suspended economic aid to Ethiopia during the Tigray war and removed the human rights violation designation on Ethiopia seven months after the official end of the conflict, despite persistent human rights concerns and reports of ethnic cleansing (Gramer, 2023; Center for Preventive Action, 2023). The Tigray conflict's potential to severely destabilize the entire Horn of Africa, particularly Somalia and the Red Sea region, has also been acknowledged (Felbab-Brown, 2021). The Biden administration has expressed a keen interest in renewing ties with Ethiopia, seeing it as a cornerstone for U.S. involvement in the continent and a crucial contributor to African security and development initiatives (Gramer, 2023).

Furthermore, the Tigray-Ethiopia conflict has been significantly influenced by the active participation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has offered extensive backing to the Ethiopian government. This assistance encompasses the provision of drones, weaponry, military training, and economic aid. The UAE's engagement is part of its broader strategy to cultivate political and security alliances in the surrounding region. The support extended by the UAE to the Ethiopian government has become a contributing factor to the conflict, prompting concerns about its repercussions on regional diplomatic relations (Demissie, 2023; Ali, 2022; "Ethiopian Prime Minister in UAE as Tigray War Rages On," 2022 ; "Schools in Ethiopia's Tigray Region Pillaged, Occupied," 2021)

Saudi Arabia has been involved in the Tigray-Ethiopia conflict in various ways. Despite not being directly engaged in the conflict; the country has received criticism for its treatment of Ethiopian migrants attempting to cross its border with Yemen. As per Human Rights Watch reports, Saudi border guards have been implicated in the deaths of hundreds of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers trying to cross the Yemen-Saudi border ("They Fired on Us like Rain' Saudi Arabian Mass Killings of Ethiopian Migrants at the Yemen-Saudi Border," 2023). These individuals were fleeing the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region, leading to the displacement of tens of thousands of people (Gambrell & Musambi, 2023). Moreover, Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with the Ethiopian government, has been repatriating thousands of Ethiopians to their home country.

However, the circumstances for these individuals returning are often severe, as they encounter detention, mistreatment, and even fatalities in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The United Nations has questioned Saudi Arabia regarding its military personnel opening fire on migrants entering from Yemen (Gambrell & Musambi, 2023). Additionally, the conflict in the Tigray region has resulted in the mistreatment and expulsion of numerous Tigrayan migrants from Saudi Arabia, who are subsequently forcibly held in Ethiopia. The Saudi Arabian

government has faced criticism for its role in this situation, as it has failed to provide protection to Tigrayans facing risks (McQue, 2022).

Ramifications of the Tigray-Ethiopian War

First and foremost, looting and assaults on priests and members of the public. An American charity organization member shared a video on Twitter on May 8, 2021, where Abune Mathias I, the leader of the Tewahedo Orthodox Church of Ethiopia and a member of the Tigray ethnic group, spoke out against an ongoing killing in Tigray. Despite reports from various Ethiopian media outlets, including the Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the archbishop of the diocese of Sidama and Gedeo, Abune Yosef, claiming that Abune Mathias I's message was his personal view and did not represent the position of the Holy Synod (Abera, 2021). Despite Tigray being cut off from the rest of the world for several months due to internet and telephone disruptions and the ban on journalists entering the area, multiple survivors have given accounts of abuses against civilians, particularly by the Eritrean military and Ethiopian federal forces. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have reported these accounts, which include massacres of civilians and clerics, numerous rapes, and looting and destruction of properties, infrastructures, and holy places. While caution is necessary when evaluating wartime information, multiple reliable sources indicate serious abuses have occurred in Tigray. Amnesty International reported that following the capture of Aksum on November 19, 2020, Eritrean troops engaged in looting of civilian properties and extrajudicial executions. From November 28 to 29, 2020, Eritrean Soldiers conducted house-to-house searches, shot civilians in the streets, and arbitrarily executed men and children in a massacre carried out as retaliation for an earlier attack by militiamen joined by armed residents (Amnesty International, 2021). Ethiopian federal troops and Amhara militias reportedly killed over 750 people gathered in Aksum's Mariam of Zion Cathedral on December 15, 2020 (Plaut, 2021). Bellingcat's fact-finding investigation also revealed extrajudicial executions of civilians in the Aksum

region by Ethiopian Soldiers, with numerous other testimonies reporting similar abuses against civilians and clerics (Bellingcat Investigation Team, 2021).

In western Tigray, hundreds of civilians were executed in May Kadra when federal ENDF troops supported by Amhara Regional State Special Forces and Amhara Fanno militias captured the town in early November 2020. While initial reports indicated that Tigrayan militants killed hundreds of Amhara civilians, further investigations in March 2021 confirmed these reports and revealed that Amhara Fanno militias killed hundreds of Tigrayan civilians and evicted many Tigrayan families from their homes (Houreld et al., 2021). In the Irob District, reliable sources report that Eritrean forces have executed many civilians from the predominantly Catholic Irob ethnic group, and people have fled to the mountains to save their lives. In a report dated June 30, 2021, written by the temporary governor of Mai Kinetal, the primary town in Wer'i Leke District, it is stated that 440 innocent individuals were killed, 558 women were subjected to rape, and 276 houses were set on fire within the district (Tghat, 2021).

Additionally, there are multiple accounts of sexual misconduct committed by uniformed men. As per a report by Sarah Charles from USAID, Ethiopian health authorities recorded no less than 950 cases of sexual violence from March to April 2021 (Charles, 2021). The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) predicts that about 22,500 individuals who suffered from sexual abuse in Tigray will require medical attention in 2021. According to Mark Lowcock, the U.N.'s chief of humanitarian affairs, acts of rape and sexual violence are being utilized to achieve political and military goals in Tigray (Gunerigok, 2021). Europe External Program with Africa (EEPA), a non-governmental organization, has gathered accounts of violence against religious figures, holy places, and cultural heritage in Tigray. One instance is the assault on several monasteries, including the Debre-Damo monastery, where a monk attested that the Eritrean army used heavy weaponry to attack the site in January 2021. The soldiers claimed they were searching for TPLF leaders who they believed were hiding there in Europe External Program with Africa (EEPA, 2021). The Al-Nejashi mosque in Negash,

one of Africa's oldest mosques, also suffered shelling damage ("Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed: 'There Is No Hunger in Tigray,'" 2021).

Additionally, the Catholic Eparchy of Addigrat has reported multiple instances of public and private buildings being vandalized and robbed following the Ethiopian Federal Army and Eritrean Forces' occupation of Addigrat. The glass and pharmaceutical factories near Addigrat recently had all their machinery and raw materials taken away. Meanwhile, buildings owned by the eparchy, such as the priests' residence, St. Mary's Agricultural University in Wuqro, the clinic, and the school in Edaga Hamus, were looted and damaged, with various items being stolen, such as school benches, medicines, computers, personal belongings, and solar panels. The United Nations received reports of these events and, in March 2021, called for an independent investigation into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights accepted the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission's request for a joint investigation (Nichols, 2021).

In second place are the refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Since November 2020, the conflict in Tigray has caused around 2 million people to relocate within the region. Amhara forces' occupation of western Tigray has also led to 63,000 individuals seeking refuge in Sudan. Due to their displacement, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) rely on host communities for their basic necessities, such as food and water, which puts a strain on already limited resources. Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, has received the highest number of conflict-displaced people, leading to overcrowded conditions, inadequate support, and shortages of medicine and food (Charles, 2021). Some small towns and village residents have fled to rural areas and are hiding in the mountains to protect their lives.

On top of that are circumstances in connection with pre-existing camps for refugees. Prior to the onset of the conflict, Tigray accommodated four primary refugee camps - May Ayni, Adi Harush, Shimelba, and Hitsats, which

collectively sheltered almost 100,000 Eritrean refugees as per UNHCR estimates. In late 2020 and early 2021, various sources confirmed the execution of hundreds of refugees. In January 2021, Shimelba and Hitsats camps were vandalized and ruined, compelling some to flee to the two remaining camps of May Ayni and Adi Harush (*UNHCR Reaches Destroyed Camps in Northern Tigray*, 2021). While Ethiopian television accused TPLF of the brutal slaying of 300 civilians in Hitsats camp, the New York Times reported that it was the Eritrean forces who attacked, looted and executed refugees as retribution for fleeing Eritrea (*Guest Map: Border Changes in Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict (February 2021)*, 2021).

In addition, there is also a major humanitarian crisis. Numerous reports indicate a significant humanitarian crisis is taking place in Tigray and the surrounding regions. This crisis, combined with Ethiopia's current economic crisis, may eventually lead to migration to regions such as Europe (Davison & Mahtani, 2020). The Tigray conflict has ended 30 years of development and hope, causing many Ethiopians, particularly those in the middle class, to contemplate emigrating as they believe Ethiopia has returned to the hardships of the 1980s (Marsai, 2021). Even before the conflict began, 1.6 million people in Tigray required humanitarian assistance out of an estimated population of 6 million. However, two and a half months after the conflict started in January 2021, the Tigray Interim Administration estimated that around 4.5 million people needed emergency humanitarian assistance (*UNHCR Reaches Destroyed Camps in Northern Tigray*, 2021). By May 2021, USAID reported that 5.2 million people required humanitarian assistance. There are numerous rural communities located in mountainous regions, as well as urban and peri-urban areas where people who have been displaced are seeking aid, all of which contain populations experiencing food insecurity. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IFSPC), roughly 4 million individuals face severe acute food insecurity in the Tigray region, along with another 1.5 million in the neighboring Afar and Amhara regional states during the months of May-June 2021. In

addition, more than 350,000 people are currently in a dire situation due to food insecurity, malnutrition, disease, and famine during the same period (Ethiopia IPC analysis team, 2021).

The ongoing strife is devastating rural communities, eradicating many essential sources of sustenance and income. Due to movement restrictions, people cannot reach markets, farmland, and necessary services, severely limiting their ability to provide for themselves and their families. As a result of the crisis, local economies have crumbled, leading to high levels of joblessness, loss of livelihoods, and weakened purchasing power. Typical temporary employment opportunities like working on farms or construction sites have become nearly non-existent. Income-generating activities like selling crops, milk, and livestock have been significantly disrupted. Furthermore, the conflict coincided with the harvest season, resulting in the loss of over 90 percent of the crop in 2020. The destruction of animals used for fieldwork and the loss of seed supplies and agricultural fertilizers could cause a shortage of agricultural resources for several years (Charles, 2021).

Moreover, there is limited information regarding extensive parts of Tigray that have been entirely cut off from the outside world due to the conflict that began in November 2020. The United Nations has estimated that around 1.6 million people are residing in remote areas of Tigray that are difficult to access. Furthermore, as of late June 2021, UNICEF has cautioned that over 33,000 severely undernourished children in such areas are at risk of imminent death if they do not receive emergency assistance promptly (Anna, 2021). Due to pillaging by military personnel, just 16% of medical facilities and clinics are operating at full capacity. In addition, nearly a quarter of all schools in Tigray have been destroyed and looted, preventing many children from obtaining education since November 2020 (“UAE Air Bridge Provides Military Support to Ethiopia Gov’t,” 2021). The ongoing conflict has caused significant damage to crucial water and sanitation infrastructure. It’s been reported that around 250 motorized water pumping systems in urban areas are no longer functioning due

to various reasons, such as lack of fuel and electricity, damage, theft, or vandalism. Moreover, the status of about 11,000 hand pumps in rural areas is uncertain, which has resulted in limited access to clean water for many people (Anna, 2021).

On June 21, 2021, Abiy Ahmed denied the occurrence of famine in Tigray during an interview with BBC News (“Tigray Crisis: Ethiopia to Repair Al-Nejashi Mosque,” 2021). Later, in another interview cited by The Ethiopian Herald newspaper on June 25, 2021, Abiy Ahmed alleged that some aid organizations were claiming a lack of access to Tigray as a pretext to justify their request for a special corridor to support the TPLF remnants whom he considers terrorists (Alemayehu, 2021). There are concerns that certain international organizations are resorting to an old tactic of fabricating famine narratives in order to bring about regime change. This approach was previously used during the Ethiopian famine of 1984/5 when aid agencies took advantage of a special corridor provided by the DERG regime to support the TPLF fighters who were seeking to overthrow the government. Some organizations are now attempting to use a similar playbook by arming the fractured junta gangs under the guise of providing humanitarian aid.

The Ethiopian government is working hard to address the aid agencies’ demands for speedy delivery of aid, but there are fears that they may continue to block aid to Tigray despite the unilateral ceasefire announcement of June 28, 2021. If this happens, it could lead to a famine on the same scale as the one that occurred during the Mengistu dictatorship in the 1980s (Pellet, 2021). There is also a risk of escalating hostilities between ethnic groups. The already heightened tensions between ethnic communities have been made worse by the conflict. A young Ethiopian student living in Europe, who has a Tigray father and an Amhara mother, shared that his father had to leave the Amhara region where he lived with his family and flee to the Tigray capital because he was in danger due to his military background in the Tigray Defense Forces after the conflict started. Meanwhile, the Tigrayans feel betrayed by other ethnic groups and the Prosperity

Party coalition, specifically for allowing the army of Eritrea, a long-standing enemy of the Tigrayans, to enter Tigray (Pellet, 2021).

Conclusion

The Tigrayan conflict can be examined through the lenses of both the structural violence theory and the protracted social conflict theory. Although both theories are applicable to various types of conflicts, the structural violence theory is more pertinent to non-violent disputes. However, it proves less effective in elucidating the Tigrayan conflict, as it predominantly delineates conflict types rather than delving into their causes and characteristics, particularly within the context of armed or violent confrontations. Conversely, the protracted social conflict theory better elucidates the origins of the Tigrayan war, given its primary focus on violent conflicts. It is noteworthy that Ethiopia satisfies the four criteria necessary for the development of a protracted social conflict, indicating that the situation has indeed evolved into one. Additionally, these four conditions imply that achieving peace and resolving the conflict will necessitate more than a mere truce from both sides, as it requires addressing deep-seated and persistent grievances.

Recommendations

The Pretoria Agreement, also known as the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA), serves as a peace treaty between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), officially signed on November 2, 2022. This agreement, which advocates for a "permanent cessation of hostilities," has provided much-needed relief and optimism to a society grappling with two years of conflict. However, its ongoing implementation is marked by several unresolved issues (Yatene, 2022)

To ensure the sustained success of the Pretoria Agreement, several critical measures can be taken. These encompass the thorough execution of the agreement's provisions, including the demobilization of fighters, the repatriation of internally displaced persons, and the reinstatement of constitutional order,

including the organization of elections (Mabera, 2023; “Turning the Pretoria Deal into Lasting Peace in Ethiopia,” 2022). International support and monitoring are imperative to guarantee adherence to the agreement and address any challenges that may arise during the implementation process (Mabera, 2023). Additionally, fostering reconciliation and dialogue among the conflicting parties is vital for establishing enduring peace (Gleixner-Hayat, 2023). Lastly, addressing the fundamental causes of the conflict, such as political and economic grievances, becomes crucial in preventing a resurgence of violence in the future (Gleixner-Hayat, 2023).

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