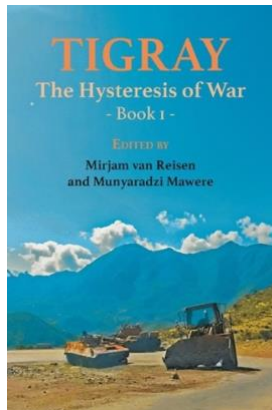


Yesterday We said Tomorrow: Hysteresis and Panarchy in War

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Yesterday We said Tomorrow: Hysteresis and Panarchy in War

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The body killed by the king couldn't get someone to bury.

Abstract

The war in Tigray significantly transformed the region and Ethiopia as a whole and affected relations in the broader Horn of Africa. Despite Eritrea's denial of invading Tigray, it played a major role in the conflict. The region was placed under siege, resulting in a complete communication blackout, effectively turning Tigray into a modern digital black hole where no information could enter or leave. As a result, the grievous atrocities committed during the conflict remained hidden from the outside world.

The atrocities committed were systematic and showed intent to eradicate the Tigray people. Military attacking civilians said they followed instructions. The concepts of hysteresis and panarchy are used to understand the severe consequences of the war. The conflict has created a new political reality, causing the people of Tigray to question their place within Ethiopia. The timeline suggests that preparations for the war began in 2018, following unsuccessful diplomatic efforts in 2017 to connect Ethiopia to the port of Assab in Eritrea. The involvement of Eritrea is evident throughout the war preparations, starting with the Eritrean President's declaration of the policy "Woyane, game over" in January 2018. The evidence gathered raises the critical question of whether genocide was committed in Tigray.

Key Words: Tigray, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Tigray war, digital black hole, hysteresis, panarchy, resilience, Rome Statute, genocide

Theatre of memory

One day Pan, the Greek God of the forest, who protects the shepherds, flocks, hunters and everything in the natural wilderness, chases an impossible love. Then he hears the wind playing in the reeds at the edge of a pond. He picks some to craft a flute; and from that day onwards the melancholic music will accompany him everywhere. Using his flute, he instils a fear that creates chaos among the largest of invading giants, the Titans. The playful and creative Pan has another power. A massive voice that can surprise unexpectedly. An unseen presence, with which he can arouse panic beyond reason and logical thinking, a collective hysterical fear. So, he can protect against those who traverse his beloved land with bad intent. Creating an echo, a noise, coming from nowhere, and circling across the terrifying and dark landscape in which the invading fighters find themselves, Pan leads them to imagined voices and human shadows. This drives the invaders crazy. Pan is the God of nature and unpredictable change, who can cause hysteria and anarchy at all levels.

The story of Pan tells us that the use of force and violence is a symptom of powerlessness. This is true for warfare, says Arendt (1969), the “arbiter in international disputes” (Arendt, 1969, p. 3), which has “lost much of its effectiveness” (Arendt, 1969, p. 3), if it ever had any, defining “nearly all of it is as glamour” (Arendt, 1969, p. 3). Glamour as the apocalyptic hysteric face of terror. Devastation, death, horror and violence is what characterised the Tigray war (2020–2022), which ended in a peace that is no peace.

In the studies presented here in these three books on the Tigray war, our intention is to present the voices of the people in Tigray and to assess critical moments and aspects of the war from the perspective of what they saw and experienced. We have written this, while the echo of the war remains audible and has not died down. We have tried to document this through the hidden transcripts of the war, left behind in a landscape of destruction and death.

You, the reader, probably picked up this book to read our findings. Allow us, for a short moment, to take you on the journey of our thought process. We consider the Tigray war as a journey – a desolate

one, walked in time, not isolated from what transpired before the war, and not isolated from what Tigray is to be after the war. We have attempted to think of this process of change in a systematic way.

We have used the concepts of hysteresis and panarchy, which together explain change through entropy – the process for systems to become more disordered, if they are not in equilibrium (Abrahamson & Freedman, 2006). Hysteresis relates to change that occurs in a system, and that is difficult to reverse. A system that enters into an alternative new form keeps echoing the change that has taken place, which makes it difficult to revert to the old situation. Panarchy is the idea that change at one level affects another.

Hysteresis, a concept originating from the Greek meaning “to lag behind”, is often defined as a phenomenon in which the response of a system may be delayed after changes in the cause have occurred (Bhargava, 2022). It describes the continuous presence of the past influencing dynamics of the present and future. As such, it is naturally connected to time, to what was ‘before’ and ‘after’. It can also be interpreted as a response conditional on the memory of the system, both its current and past states (Sheldrake, 2011). In psychology this can be found in the memories of a wished-for-world wrapped in the stories about the past, holding the stubborn facts of evidence of a real life experienced (Loftus, 2013). Bourdieu (1990) used it to refer to a mismatch between the environment that a community is in and the one the community is adjusted to, explaining it as a false anticipation of the future based on what the community knows of the past. The presence of the past in this kind of false anticipation of the future performed by the habitus of a community is, paradoxically, most clearly seen when the sense of the probable future is belied in ‘the habitus’:

which embodies (literally) the tension between individual agency and social forces, and occupies a position in a field with other habitus, each defined by their difference from the others. (Joseph, 2020, p. 1)

This is a situation when dispositions are ill-adjusted to the objective changes that occur, because the environment the community

encounters is too different from the one to which the community is adjusted (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 62).

In the context of war, this application of hysteresis is useful when looking at trauma on an individual and institutional level, leading to behaviour and values that were formed by the experiences during the war, but may be mismatched in a post-war environment. However, it is limiting when it focuses solely on agentic behaviour, omitting the dynamics of systems at various scales.

The importance of the interlinkages between different scales is at the core of the concept of panarchy, which focuses on systematising the dynamic relationship between change and persistence, and between what is predictable and what is unpredictable. Panarchy is a concept that explains how a system, at various scales, can respond to disturbances it faces, both predictable and unpredictable, such as during a war, and how people engage with the situation (Gunderson and Holling, 2004).

Hysteresis has, for instance, been applied in the targeting of civilians in armed conflicts through the intensification of lethal behaviour of armed groups against civilians in prolonged conflict (Lee, 2015). Therefore, it can help us understand the (violent) actions by armed troops towards civilians, where the memory of a violent past state (armed combat) leads to violent behaviour in an environment in which it is not appropriate (according to international conventions), namely, in civilian settings. This is even more clear when looking at the aggressive behaviour of Eritrean troops in Tigray, which were already trained in conditions of extreme hostility in Eritrea.

On a broader level, for instance, in the large-scale destruction of agriculture or healthcare, hysteresis is seen in the lagging behind of capacity, even after the war has ended. The exponential increase in the need for food and healthcare, thus, leads to shortages, even when capacity is back to pre-war levels.

If we zoom out to the global scale, the application of hysteresis in conflict becomes increasingly relevant. In Tigray, many ways of raging war were introduced on a systemic level, such as the complete destruction of healthcare and the two-year siege, leaving the civilians

in the region with no access to food, water and electricity. These strategies have resurfaced in other conflicts that have taken centre stage since, in which hysteresis in war leads to increased atrocities towards civilians (Lee, 2015). The plight of civilians in the wars in Tigray, Sudan and Gaza are related to hysteresis on different scales.

The dynamics leading to the perpetuation of conflict in a region can be juxtaposed against the agency of the local population in breaking the cycle through, for instance, resistance and diplomacy (Arendt, 1969). For example, Mac Ginty (2014) embodies this in the practising of “everyday peace” by individuals and collectives living within conflict-affected societies. While agency is sometimes described as a static capability of the individual in relation to the surrounding structure (Campbell, 2009), Emirbayer and Mische (1998) conceptualise it as a temporal process of understanding a situation, rooted in the past and oriented towards the present and future. The expression of agency may, thus, change based on whether one is more focused on the past, present or future at any given time.

Agency does not operate in isolation. It is the ability to understand the situation at different levels, and to act upon this understanding. Panarchy references that adaptive cycles are nested in a hierarchy across time and space, in which accumulations from the past are available for present renewal and innovation through agentic capability (Gunderson and Holling, 2004). Both the concepts of hysteresis and panarchy can provide a lens through which to look at complex interactions within (social) systems, thereby capturing the essence of resilience, adaptation and transformation in evolving environments (Stocker, 2024).

Hidden transcripts: “We wanted the womb of Tigrayan women to be infertile”

Pan’s forest may serve as a metaphor for a ‘dark place’, a ‘black hole’, a digital black hole in our modern digital age, caused by a communication blackout and siege. Causing a place to be completely isolated in the connected globalised world of today is a weapon of war. The population in Tigray was physically gated by the siege and digitally gated by the communication block-out. It allowed for those

holding the keys to the gates to negotiate what comes in and what goes out, whether food, humanitarian aid or information. It allowed for invading perpetrators, such as the Eritreans, to remain ‘invisible’, as no information came out, which allowed them to deny their presence. It allowed for atrocities to be perpetrated with impunity.

The siege and communication blackout inhibited those living in the digital back hole from reaching out and seeking empathy and solidarity with others, who did not know of the situation inside. It broke the support systems that enhanced resilience, and it stopped the social, economic and political links that sustained the community. The purpose of a siege is to break the collective resolve and resilience of the people in the area under siege.

A siege and a digital black hole isolating a people under distress may aim to create the conditions in which a people appear to have perished from the Earth, leaving only their shadow and the echo of voices of the past. It is easy to give up on such a people. The community has already gone, left without a future, left without new beginnings, left without the capacity to create and recreate, produce and reproduce. In hidden transcripts, the capacity to (re-)generate becomes the battlefield.

Traces of intent are left behind in the dark inside. Unbelievably, after the Tigray war, a doctor retrieved a message wrapped in a plastic sheet from within the womb of a young Tigrayan woman who had been raped by Eritrean soldiers. The message states the reason for the rape inside her body (see Figure 1.1):

Deki Erena [‘we Eritreans’] are always Heroes.

That is how we do! And we will still keep doing this. We want the wombs of Tigrayan women to be infertile.

We are still seeking to revenge you what you did to us in the 1990s.

Together with the piece of paper, the doctors found stones that had been put in the young woman’s womb. On the backside of the same message, it reads:

We Eritreans, people from Asmara are Heroes.

How on Earth can you forget what you have done to us in 09. Even if you do forget it, we will not forget. From now onwards any Tigrayan will not give birth, will not have a baby from a Tigrayan.

We shall make sure you know and we will show you how unforgiving we are. So, don't leave any [Tigrayan] woman alive from now onwards: just kill them all.

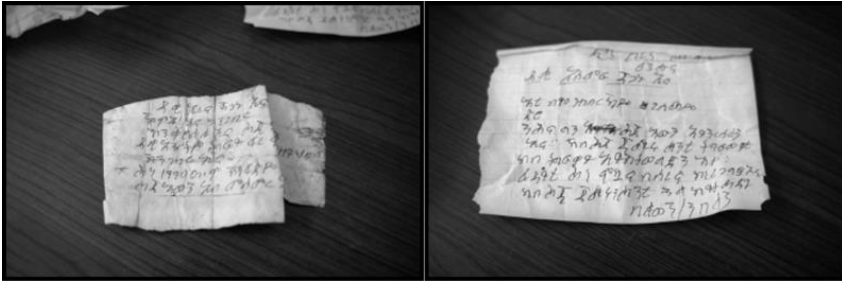


Figure 1.1. Messages found wrapped in plastic in a woman's womb

(First published by

<https://x.com/XimenaBorrazas/status/179542778393570968>) (Retrieved from patient's file, saved under special protection)

The message carried in the womb of the woman leaves the echo of what the war against the Tigrayan people tried to tell them: that they had no right to exist. Using the derogatory terms ‘Woyane’, ‘agame’, ‘junta’, and ‘banda’, the people of Tigray were identified as illegitimate, terrorists, traitors, ‘farmers’ – of a lesser kind, unworthy of life.

The statement “We want the wombs of Tigrayan women to be infertile” (Figure 1.1) speaks to the hysteresis of war; the transition into a new state and the near impossibility to transition back to what was before. This statement also speaks to panarchy, the situation that a transition at one level, affects the reality at all levels. The intent to ensure that Tigray women will not give birth to new life affects the hopelessness of the situation of the Tigray community in the war as a whole, which carries the consequences of the attack into the future as a permanent new state.

Hidden transcripts refer to the underlying implicit meaning of denigrating activity, rendering people, or a people, to being of a lesser

non-human kind, discourse that is often hidden away from formal public policy:

Slavery, serfdom, the caste system, colonialism, and racism routinely generate the practices and rituals of denigration, insult, and assaults on the body that seem to occupy such a large part of the hidden transcripts of their victims. (Scott, 1992)

Hidden transcripts or messages (not necessarily in writing) are also delivered by the destruction of a hospital or other indispensable facility. Destruction, unfortunately, is part of warfare, but destruction that is explicitly meant to (also) harm or exterminate civilians is not simply warfare, but can be characterised as a violation of fundamental human rights. As such it cannot simply be called ‘war’ or ‘collateral damage’, as it is often claimed to be. The hidden transcript underlying such actions, in other words, does not simply refer to ‘war’, but instead must be read and interpreted as a crime against humanity, an atrocity crime and/or genocide. The research presented in these books, contributes to decipher such hidden transcripts in the Tigray war.

Using the concept of hidden transcripts in this specific way, intentionally differs from its ‘original’ meaning, as proposed by Scott (1992). In the case of this study, the term hidden transcripts refers to the underlying, hidden intentions (e.g., genocide) in semiotic signs produced by oppressors, whereas Scott (1992) focuses on the intentions that are hidden in the semiotic signs produced by the oppressed.

We follow Scott in his observation that attempts to subordinate are met with resistance. This makes the nature of a future state of a situation unpredictable. In his book, *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, Rutger Bregman (2019) outlines the effect of the targeting of civilians in war through the bombing of London and German cities in the second World War. The idea behind these bombings was to break the morale and resistance of the British and German people. Yet what became obvious, more than anything else, is that the targeting of civilians in war leads to more resistance and more resilience (Bregman, 2019). A paper published by Kimhi *et al.* (2023) on the

resilience of Ukrainians compared with Israelis concluded the following:

It appears that a war that threatens the independence and sovereignty of a country may, under certain conditions, enhance the societal resilience and hope of the population under risk, despite a lower sense of wellbeing and higher levels of distress, sense of danger, and perceived threats. (Kimihi et al., 2023, p. 7)

These narratives fit well with the resilience shown by many people in Tigray during the war. This resilience was expressed in all layers of society and included innovative strategies to cope with the extreme circumstances of siege, Internet blackout, and lack of basic supplies.

Yesterday we said tomorrow

The title of this chapter refers to the exhibition ‘Yesterday we said Tomorrow’ staged in New Orleans (2020), which referred to the album of the avant-garde jazz musician Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah (2012): *Yesterday You said Tomorrow*. The exhibition titled Prospect 5, which was held in New Orleans in March of 2020 reminds us of our own situation as researchers of the Tigray war:

In a country that has refused to reconcile with its own history, and in a city where those contested beliefs play out in the town square, these [researchers] allow us to reconsider our sense of time, our knowledge of history, our use of land, our belief in objects and rituals, our collective power, and most importantly, the space of tomorrow, always on the horizon. (Keith & Nawi, 2021, p. 33)

As was the case in the exhibition, our research resulted from a dialogue on the difficult realities we, academics, faced collectively in 2020 when war began. How should we, inside and outside of Tigray, make sense of the situation? Recognising the challenging situation, this research was undertaken by all of us together, as an expression of the expectations of hope for a better tomorrow.

This book brings together the studies of researchers inside and outside of Tigray, resulting from collaboration between Mekelle University, Aksum University, Adigrat University, Great Zimbabwe University, Tilburg University, Leiden University and universities from across the African continent. The researchers participate in the Research Network Globalisation, Accessibility, Innovation and Care

(GAIC), which investigates the problem of data black holes, i.e., communities that are not connected to the global Internet. Little did we know, when we started, that we would be separated by a complete communication blackout for two years. This was research of a black hole situation in real time and experienced in real life (Gebreslassie, 2024).

During the two-year long siege, we investigated the reality separately from within and outside Tigray. The collaboration now uniquely brings together the work of the researchers who experienced the war from inside Tigray, with the work of the researchers who experienced the war from outside Tigray. All of the researchers were engaged with the situation of the war when it took place, but from different positionalities and with different types of data.

The researchers outside of Tigray came together in a team that produces the daily Situation Reports on the Horn of Africa, which are published by the European External Programme with Africa (EEPA). Starting on the 17 November 2020, the EEPA Situation Reports provided a daily bulletin of information from the ground – often lagging in time. The communication blackout, the closure of the Internet and the lack of access of journalists made it very difficult to know what was happening inside Tigray. Establishing trusted channels and verifying as much as was possible under the circumstances, the Situation Reports provided a summary of what was known – outside – about the war at the time. Being an almost daily two-page bulletin, it provides a granular reference to the developments in time. Many of the events that were first published in the Situation Reports, such as the Aksum massacre or the attack on the Debredamo convent, were later confirmed (Tesfa, Bächtold, Gebremichael, & Van Reisen, 2024). The Situation Reports opened a small but important gate from Tigray, during the siege. These reports were complemented by the important work of other groups of researchers, tirelessly keeping their gaze on Tigray, focusing on complementary information, which has supported the overall understanding of the war – from outside Tigray.

Meanwhile, inside Tigray, a group of researchers met daily in Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Hospital of Mekelle University

(Medhanyie & Wuneh, 2024). Withstanding the extremely difficult circumstances of the war and withstanding the many pressures of survival the researchers and their families faced, keeping their resilience in the face of difficult circumstances of loss of loved ones while engaging with the hard realities of the war, they documented, engaged other scholars and students, collected primary data, and innovated to increase the communication channels with the outside world in a safe way. They walked every day to the university. Without phone and Internet, communication went through chains of people. This outstanding team made sure that the events of the war were meticulously described ensuring that people in Tigray were given a voice to express what they had experienced (Medhanyie & Wuneh, 2024).

Midway through the war, the two groups working together, in separate spaces, succeeded in creating a solid communication line, through the creativity and repurposing of ICT hardware inside Tigray, creating a connection to the outside world. This was a small victory of breaking through the black hole (Gebreslassie, 2024) and allowed the researchers to have weekly meetings to share and discuss their work and provide mutual support. We established daily connections making intimacies possible across the confines of physical boundaries (Nyamnjob, 2015). The Mekelle-based team even presented their work virtually at the European Development Days in June 2021. Work was also presented in online webinars, allowing for discussions from the inside of locked Tigray with the outside world. This forbidden representation from within Tigray to the outside world felt momentous. The EEPA webinars focused on the massacres, sexual violence, the destruction of religious places, religious artefacts and historic monuments, the destruction of the health care system, and the destruction of farms and famine. Researchers from other groups took place in the debates, which helped to validate initial findings.

This discussion over the Internet from our separated places to a public audience set a pathway in which we felt comfortable to interrogate each other, explore how things were recorded, narrated, and remembered, as well as forgotten, as well as how we could cross over from the individual experience to a collective sense and meaning.

Following the war, the two groups started the work of triangulating the data available from within Tigray with those recorded outside Tigray. In some instances, this led to new collaborations in which new teams were formed that crosschecked all the available data. The collaboration led to new insights from both sides.

Most importantly and foremost, this research wants to publish the work of the researchers in Tigray, to bring forth the voice of the people in Tigray, who were completely silenced by the siege. It brings together empirical studies, which analyse different facets of the war. Comparing the work of the two teams in their separate locations has helped to reach common understanding. Hence, this project is the result of a composition:

It integrates what in the original may have been divergent, synthesizes different classes of information, and plays different order of experience against one another. It brings the half-forgotten back to life [...]. And it creates a consecutive narrative out of fragments, imposing order on chaos, and producing images far clearer than any reality could be. (Samuel, 2012, p. xxiii)

After the war we continued to meet every week. We asked each other to explain what material was collected when, where, by whom, how it was analysed and what the basis was for conclusions presented. We also identified what was missing and what had been left out. All chapters were reviewed by at least two blind peer reviewers, who are independent academics not engaged with the research-team itself.

The study was localised in the Tigray region, the northern region of Ethiopia, which shares a thousand-kilometre-long border with Eritrea. Under the constitution of Ethiopia, Tigray is a regional state that borders Amhara Regional State in the South and Afar Regional State in the East. West of Tigray is Sudan.

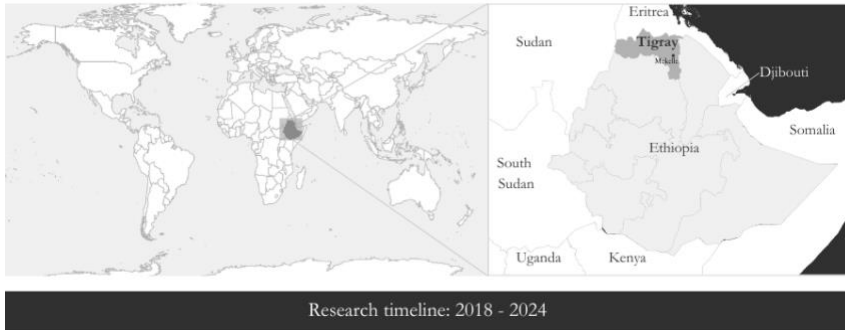


Figure 1.2. Research location and timeline

The study covers the period of the war from 4 November 2020, when the Ethiopian government declared a law-and-order operation in the region, up to 3 November 2022 when the Pretoria Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities (between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, the political party leading the Tigray region) was implemented. The study traces the lead up to the war, especially the Peace Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which was signed in July 2018. It identifies the participants in the war. It engages with what is now left of the war, such as the graffiti on the walls and the damaged infrastructure and cultural heritage, left as messages to the future.

All researchers who engaged in this study – each one of them – were courageous and fearless. During and after the war, the situation was often dangerous. Researchers were threatened – some of them still are. The situation affected everyone on a personal level, while the fate of family members was unknown, loved ones died and the experiences of the war were deeply traumatising. To investigate the circumstances, meant engaging with the trauma of ourselves and of others. So as not to live in the pain caused by existential loss, every one of us had to find a way of moving forwards (Van der Kolk, 2014), renouncing much of the baggage of the past and embracing the future (Gleick, 1998).

We became a strong group with one purpose. We had to understand our own interpretation to transparently sensitise the world to the situation. To interrogate the findings meant accepting others’

intelligibility of the situation. We learnt that this was a productive performative work and that it was multidirectional. We had to give up any competitive sense towards one absolute claim on the truth (Rothberg, 2009). We synchronised around a common direction to break through the silence of the siege, we synchronised on the methodology of academic rigour and we synchronised on what was in our hearts. We admit, wholeheartedly, that we cared (Pink, 2018). We are not ashamed of it. Today, as we present the results of this collective work to you here, we, like Misghe, the Eritrean kid who flees from his country in the book “Amid the Chaos” (Mogos, 2016), we feel shaken – but also grateful, for a shared moment of clarity.

Organisation of this book

This study is divided into three books. In the first book, we focus on what we refer as the ‘hysteresis’ of war: this relates to the question of fundamental change in Tigray that was caused by the war. Most importantly, this book deals with the question whether the war was inflicted with genocidal intent. The legal answer to this question, is presented at the Chapter 13 of this volume.

To make sense of the war, we need to understand the actors in the war, the perpetrators, the timelines and turning points, and what were expressed as the aims of involvement. The book starts from the understanding that atrocities are perpetrated with the aim to break the resilience of a group and fundamentally alter their existence, preferably to the point of non-existence. To what extent the war succeeded in doing so is an important question, which we reflect on in this volume.

In the second volume, we explore how the war impacted Tigray society at all levels, examining how changes at different levels informed each other through the concept of panarchy (Van Reisen & Mawere, 2024). The third volume (Van Reisen, Medhanyie & Mawere, 2024) adopts an agentic view of resilience: How did the people of Tigray perceive their situation, despite being unable to communicate it to the outside world? How did they respond to being trapped in a digital blackout and under siege? And how did they cope with the emerging circumstances? While these books document the

heartbreaking destruction, massacres, and assaults on human dignity, they also highlight examples of creativity and speak to the human capacity to survive and innovate in the face of severe adversity.

The genesis and general overview of the war is discussed in the Chapter 2, “‘Game Over’: Key Markers of the Tigray War in Redefining the Region’ by Melicherová *et al.* (2024). They trace key moments that are decisive in the war. This chapter identifies the key periods of the war and the preparations for it. It also identifies the key actors in the war. This chapter locates the first turning point towards the war as January 2018, when Eritrean president Isayas warns in a speech: ‘Game over, Woyane’. President Isayas threatens the Tigray leadership and population, which he referred to with the derogatory term ‘Woyane’, and defines them as a target.

In Chapter 3, ‘From Hidden to Open War in Tigray: Structural and Proximate Causes’, Gebreslassie and Van Reisen (2024) look at the causes of the war, pointing to regional aspirations leading to preparations for war from at least 2018 onwards, and with roots even earlier. The chapter demystifies the war as a law-and-order operation and shows that the dynamics of serious conflict caused the war to erupt, including claims on the situation made from neighbouring Eritrea.

Tesfa and Van Reisen (2024a) describe the involvement of Eritrea in the war in Chapter 4, ‘Regional War by Design: The Involvement of Eritrea in the Tigray War’. The authors conclude that the involvement of Eritrea, which was denied in the first five months of the war, was systematic and deliberate. Not only was Eritrea involved in the war during the whole time, it was also involved in the design of it. Warning Tigray in January 2018 with the slogan “‘Game over Woyane”, President Isayas detailed the reasons and circumstances of the upcoming demise of Tigray, masked by a Peace Agreement concluded in July 2018 with Prime Minister Abiy, after he came to power in Ethiopia in April 2018. The timeline suggests a key role of President Isayas in the formulation of a plan to confront Tigray.

In Chapter 5, ‘Weaponising the Media: Exploring the Role of Ethiopian National Media in the Tigray War’, Geb & Tesfa (2024)

discuss the way in which the war was framed by the Ethiopian media, with the dissemination of ethnic-based hate speech. This chapter discusses the different frames that were exploited, which dehumanised the Tigray population, while contributing to drum up support for the war. These tools not only served to defend the war being waged on Tigray, but also led to increased violence towards Tigrayans anywhere in Ethiopia. They further find that the communications blackout meant that Tigray could not defend itself against the false allegations and sentiments of hatred communicated in the propaganda and hate-speech.

In Chapter 6, 'Famine as a Weapon in the Tigray War and the Siege', Kahsay (2024) describes the evidence of how food production was deliberately undermined and other pathways to food security were systematically blocked. This included the blocking of salaries, bank transfers, and support from relatives outside Tigray. It included the destruction of farming tools, culling of flock and displacement of farmers. It also included the blockade of humanitarian assistance. The communication blockade ensured that information on the famine was not available in international media. The authors conclude that the Ethiopian authorities were well aware of the famine in Tigray, but that the siege was a deliberate attempt to use famine as a weapon in the war and asks the question whether the perpetration of genocide was aided by the deliberate undermining of the ability of the population to survive the war through the deliberate creation of a famine.

In Chapter 7, 'Bodies for Battle Fields: Systematic Use of Rape as a Weapon of War in Tigray', Kidanu and Van Reisen (2024) discuss the use of gender-based violence as a weapon. Investigating the *modus operandi*, the author finds rape was used in a systematic and deliberate manner to instil fear. The perpetration included all allied forces of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), including the Eritrean military. Sexual violence was used to traumatise, infect people with HIV, and cause infertility in Tigrayan women. The rapes had a sadistic character and left a deep traumatic physical and mental impact on women and their families, led to collective trauma, undermining the

fabric of society. The authors conclude that the *modus operandi* warrants a further investigation into the genocidal intent of the rape.

In Chapter 8, “Vultures were Circling the Areas”: Massacres during the ‘Tigray War’, Tesfa, Bächtold, Gebremichael and Van Reisen (2024a) discuss the massacres that took place during the war, triangulating evidence across different sources, and finding patterns in the *modus operandi*: the execution of men, the rape of women, the restriction of burials, and violence based on ethnicity and religion. The chapter also discusses the perpetrators of the massacres – Eritrean, Ethiopian and Amhara soldiers – and their hostility towards victims based on ethnicity and religious practices. The violence of the massacres appeared to be systematic and coordinated.

In Chapter 9, ‘Throwing bodies into the Tekeze River: Assessment of Massacres’, Tesfa, Bächtold, Gebremichael, and Van Reisen (2024b) study the massacres using a database compiled by Ghent University, which mapped 478 civilian killing events during the Tigray war. The study finds that casualties by targeted executions were greater than those from active conflict. It also investigates the recurrence of massacres in the same location, finding that 76% of massacres occurred in the same place between 2 and 12 times. The findings indicate the systematic targeting of civilians. The massacres occurred under a communication blackout which prevented media from publishing information on them. The Eritrean presence was denied, which allowed Eritreans, who claimed to be under instruction to kill civilians, to conduct these massacres with impunity.

Chapter 10, “Followers of the Devil’s Code 666”: The Writing on the Wall of an Intent to Eradicate a People’, by Tesfa, Van Reisen and Medhanyie (2024), investigates graffiti and signs left in public spaces by soldiers who invaded Tigray, as well as in a school and hospital. The analysis shows the strong hostile feelings by the invading military forces towards Tigrayans, with messages and slogans justifying their eradication. Most graffiti and signs tried to dissociate Tigrayans from the rest of Ethiopia, mobilise for the eradication of Tigrayans, and spread fear against the ‘power’ held by Tigrayans. An undercurrent emerging in the graffiti is of Tigray people not being human, and even

associated with the Devil, showing a mindset that prepares for killing and eradication without mercy.

In Chapter 11, ‘The Turning Points towards the Unequal Protection of Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia: From Protection to Abduction’, Melicherova (2024) investigates the perpetration of the abduction of Eritrean refugees from Tigray territory where the refugees had previously received international protection from the political persecution by the Eritrean regime. In the chapter, Melicherova finds that the destruction by Eritrea of four refugee camps, hosting an estimated 100,000 Eritrean refugees, sets an extraordinary precedent that has not happened before, and which is an egregious violation of international law concerning the protection of refugees. The refugees were taken from the camps by force and repatriated to Eritrea, where they disappeared. Melicherova concludes that some were imprisoned, and others were cynically deployed by Eritrea to fight in the Tigray war, by force, against the very region that had hosted them as refugees.

In Chapter 12, “‘He had Orders, and His Superiors were Outside’: Strategic Rape as Genocide in Tigray’, Kidanu and Tefera (2024) conclude that rape during the war in Tigray was conducted with the explicit intent to make women infertile. The authors found that the sexual violence in Tigray was committed systematically and deliberately, characterised by a clear intention to commit violence and destroy the Tigrayan ethnicity, including by serious bodily and mental harm, the blocking of access to essential services, including health services, and acts intended to prevent births within the Tigrayan population. The evidence shows that the rape was carried out with systematic and deliberate intent and on the orders of the superiors of the soldiers. The perpetrators included both Ethiopian and Eritrean military.

In Chapter 13, the concluding chapter, by Tefera (2024) entitled ‘Genocidal Intent in the Tigray War: Establishing Reasonable Grounds Based on Evidence’, the legal case is presented for genocide, concluding that the evidence provides reasonable grounds to investigate the war in Tigray as a genocide. The evidence provides a clear rationale of intent. There is a consistent pattern of execution,

which is ordered and supported from the highest level of the governments involved in the planning, preparation and execution of it. These acts included extra-judicial killings, large scale sexual violence, deliberate deprivation of resources indispensable for survival, and the expulsion of ethnic Tigrayans from their homes, all of which fall under the prohibited acts of the crime of genocide. The perpetrators are identified as the ENDF, Eritrean military and regional Amhara forces. The legal obligation to investigate the crime of genocide rests with the international community to ensure persecution of all carrying responsibility for the crime.

Principal findings

Comparing findings from across the chapters in the three volumes, some important elements emerge that are essential to comprehend the Tigray war. We focus on four elements. Firstly, the new political reality that provided the context of the Tigray war and which has resulted in a new political situation as a consequence of the war. This reflects hysteresis and panarchy. Secondly, the timeline of the Tigray war, which seems to begin as early as January 2018, even before the inauguration of Prime minister Abiy in Ethiopia, with the definition of a strategy: “Game, over Woyane”, set out by Eritrean president Isayas. Thirdly, the secret involvement of Eritrea in the war and its preparations, which emerged as a critical actor related to every aspect of the war and of its consequences. And, finally, despite the imposed situation of Tigray as a black hole under siege and communication blockade, the release of information and voice, calling for justice, accountability and demonstrating creative agency to build back better.

A new political reality

On 3 April 2018, Abiy Ahmed was appointed Prime Minister of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling coalition in Ethiopia at the time. On the 23 June a grenade was thrown at the stage where the Prime Minister was sitting during a rally that took place in Addis Ababa’s Meskel Square. Shortly after the explosion the crowd began to chant “down, down Woyane”, accusing Tigrayans of having plotted the assassination attempt on Prime Minister Abiy (The East African, 2018). The attack was associated in

the media with the then recent announcement of the initiative of peace with Eritrea (The Guardian, 2018).¹

This was a prelude to the political shift, which on 1 December 2019 replaces the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) with the new Prosperity Party (PP). The TPLF, at that point representing the Tigray regional government, did not join the EPRDF. In addition, the Tigray regional government argued that the constitution should be followed, and that this stipulated that new elections at the federal and regional state level should be held in 2020. Prime Minister Abiy did not follow this argument. He justified the decision to postpone elections due to the COVID-19 situation. The Regional Government of Tigray, led by the TPLF, decided differently, and held elections on 9 September 2020. This caused further friction between Tigray and the Ethiopian federal leadership.

This increased tension led to a number of events, which culminated in the declaration of a law-and-order operation by the Ethiopian government on the Tigray region on the 4 November 2020.² The military operation led immediately to a full-blown war, with several invading military parties (Melicherová *et al.*, 2024; Gebreslassie & Van Reisen, 2024; Kassa, 2021). In May 2021 the TPLF was designated as a terrorist organisation. Following the signing of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on 2 November 2022, the designation of the TPLF as a terrorist organisation was removed on 23 March 2023. A new regional government was installed in Tigray, led by President Getachew Reda, previously the senior advisor and spokesperson of the TPLF during the war and negotiator of the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for the TPLF.

The war in Tigray was the result of strong tensions in Ethiopia's relations with the Tigray region. The sense of not being protected by the Ethiopian government, but, instead, being attacked by the

¹ None of those convicted and charged were of Tigrayan origin (BBC, 2018; Kassa, 2021).

² Although it is claimed that the war started the night before, on 3 November, when the federal government of Ethiopia sent commandos to Mekelle (SRC-1047, EEPA, 2021, SR 44).

Ethiopian allied forces, undoubtedly left strong feelings in Tigray. This included the questioning of belonging and left an expectation among the Tigray population that more independence and autonomy would resolve causes of future conflict (Gebrewahd *et al.*, 2024; Claes, 2024). The Tigray war has undoubtedly created a new political reality in Ethiopia – a new situation, with new sensitivities and new dynamics. We could refer to this outcome as the hysteresis of war.

Hysteresis

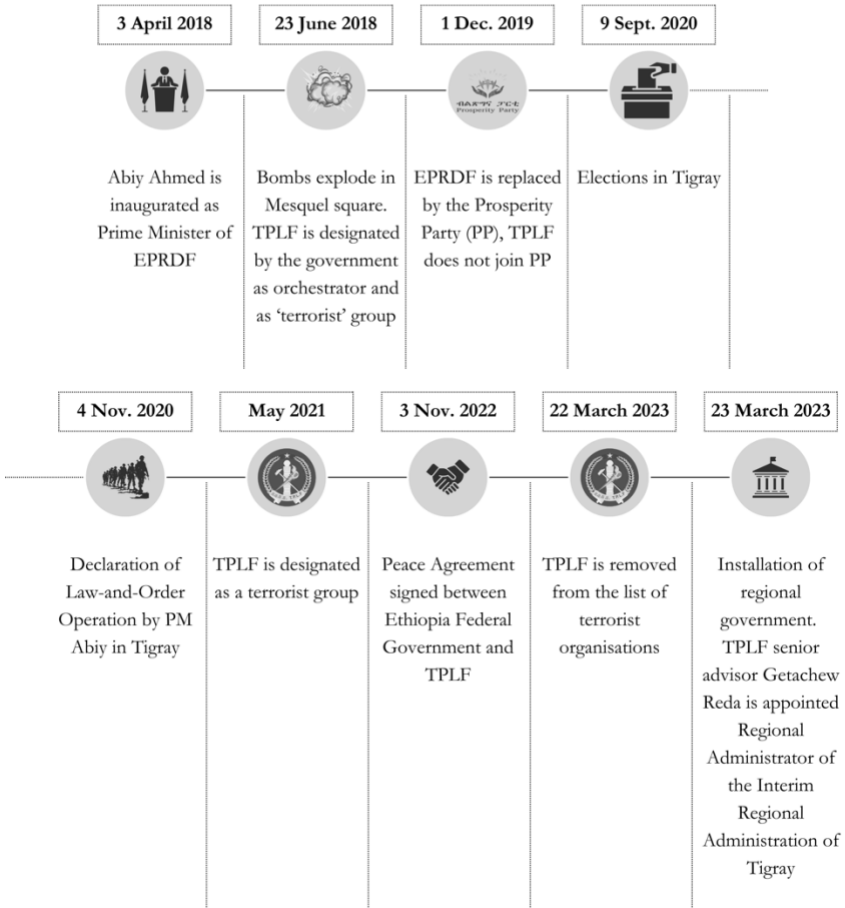


Figure 1.3. Political events in Ethiopia – Tigray relations

Timeline of the Tigray War

The slogan used in the war “Game over, Woyane” was introduced by President Isayas of Eritrea, prior to the appointment of Prime Minister Abiy in Ethiopia (Melicherová *et al.*, 2024; Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024a). The slogan was introduced in a speech by President Isayas on 14 January 2018. Melicherová *et al.*, 2024 identify 10 critical junctures in the Tigray war (Figure 1.4).

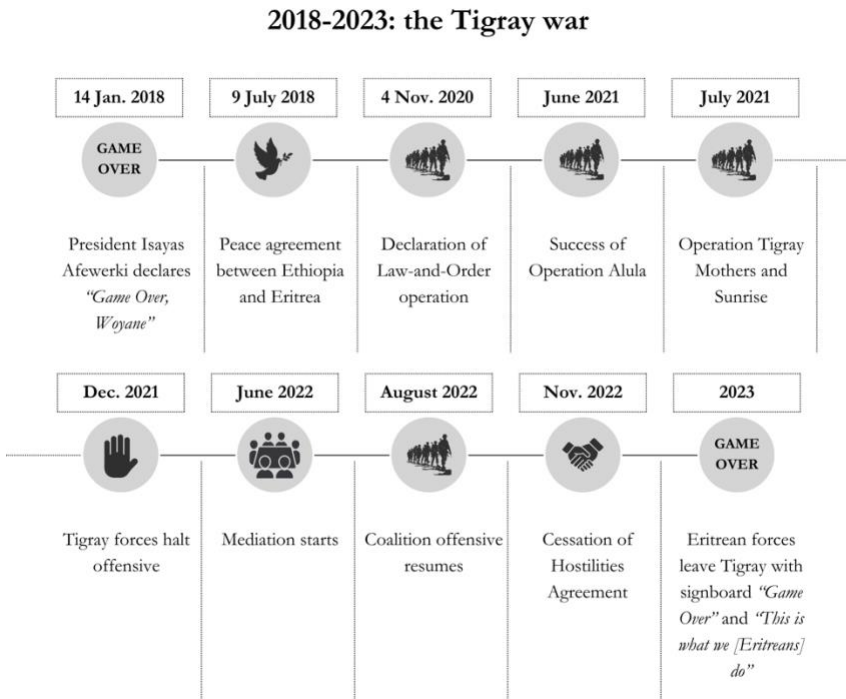


Figure 1.4. Overview of critical points in the Tigray war

Created based on Melichberva et al. 2024

Prime Minister Abiy was appointed prime minister of Ethiopia in April 2018. A Peace Agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea was signed in July 2018. The contents of the Peace Agreement have remained secret. On the 4 November 2020, the Ethiopian government declared “አግ የማስከበር ዘመቻ”, a ‘law-and-order operation’, which was later changed to “የአግ ማስከበርና የህልውና ዘመቻ” ‘law enforcement and existential operation’ on 11 November 2020 (EBC, 2020n, 0:00:47).

However, the war had already begun on the 3 November (UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, 2022; Van Reisen, 2021; Van Reisen *et al.* 2021) with a series of preparations leading up to it (Melicherová *et al.*, 2024; Gebreslassie & Van Reisen, 2024; Kassa, 2021). Following the military operations in Tigray by the ENDF and allied forces, including Amhara regional forces, and Eritrea Defense Forces (Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024a), an administration directly assigned by Ethiopia was installed in Tigray.

Following the invasion, the TPLF retreated and rearranged the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) to launch Operation Alula in June 2021. The TPLF regained control over the Tigray capital, Mekelle. The TDF then launched Operation Tigray Mothers in July 2021, in which the TDF moved towards Addis Ababa in an unexpected attempt to advance a reverse of the balance of power, break the siege and the communication blockade. Under military and diplomatic pressure, the TDF halted the offensive and retreated to the Tigray region in December 2021 (Melicherová *et al.*, 2024). In August 2022, the ENDF allied forces resumed an offensive against the TDF, followed by negotiations in South Africa, which led to the Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed on 2 November 2022 (Melicherová *et al.*, 2024).

Eritrean involvement in the war in Tigray

Tesfa, Van Reisen and Smits (2024) provide some further context to a plausible timeline from 2017 onwards. This involves shuttle diplomacy that takes place in 2017 on a proposition for a settlement of the Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict, access for Ethiopia to the Assab port in Eritrea, and financial assistance from the European Union (EU) for roads to support the infrastructural connections of the port. According to the reconstruction by Tesfa, Van Reisen and Smits (2024), the negotiations involved at least a negotiator from Israel, the President of Eritrea, Isayas Afwerki, the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Hailemariam Desalegn, and the former regional government of Tigray.

Tesfa, Van Reisen and Smits (2024) argue that the evidence suggests that the Tigray regional government did not consent to the

proposition offered in December 2017 by the diplomatic effort led by Israel to provide Addis Ababa with access to Assab port in Eritrea. Whatever may be the case, Eritrean President Isayas announced the plan to target Tigray in a public speech given on 14 January 2018. The salient element is that the outline of the plan presented by President Isayas as ‘Game over, Woyane’, is offered prior to the appointment of Prime Minister Abiy. It speaks of a shift in the international political reality that will enable the policy (Tesfa, Van Reisen & Smits, 2024).

This quiet shuttle diplomacy has never been publicly revealed. The content of the 2018 Eritrea-Ethiopia peace agreement, which was launched in the following year, has also never been disclosed. Prime Minister Abiy visited Assab port soon after the Peace Deal was signed in 2018 and the EU proceeded to support Eritrea with a programme to build roads to connect the port to Ethiopia. The two leaders, President Isayas and Prime Minister Abiy, visited key military strategic installations announcing full access to each countries’ military assets (Tesfa, Van Reisen & Smits, 2024). Making use of the strategic Eritrean border with Tigray, which is a thousand kilometres long, preparations for war involved military operations across the two countries (Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024a). Eritrea entered Tigray prior to the announcement of the law-and-order operation on 4 November 2020 and prior to the flights that brought Ethiopian special forces to Mekelle on 3 November (Gebreslassie & Van Reisen, 2024; Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024a; Tesfa, Van Reisen & Smits, 2024). Refugees (former soldiers) from Eritrea in Sudan gave testimony of having been deployed for the attack prior to the 3 November (Smits & Wirtz, 2024).

2018: Start of ‘Operation Game Over’

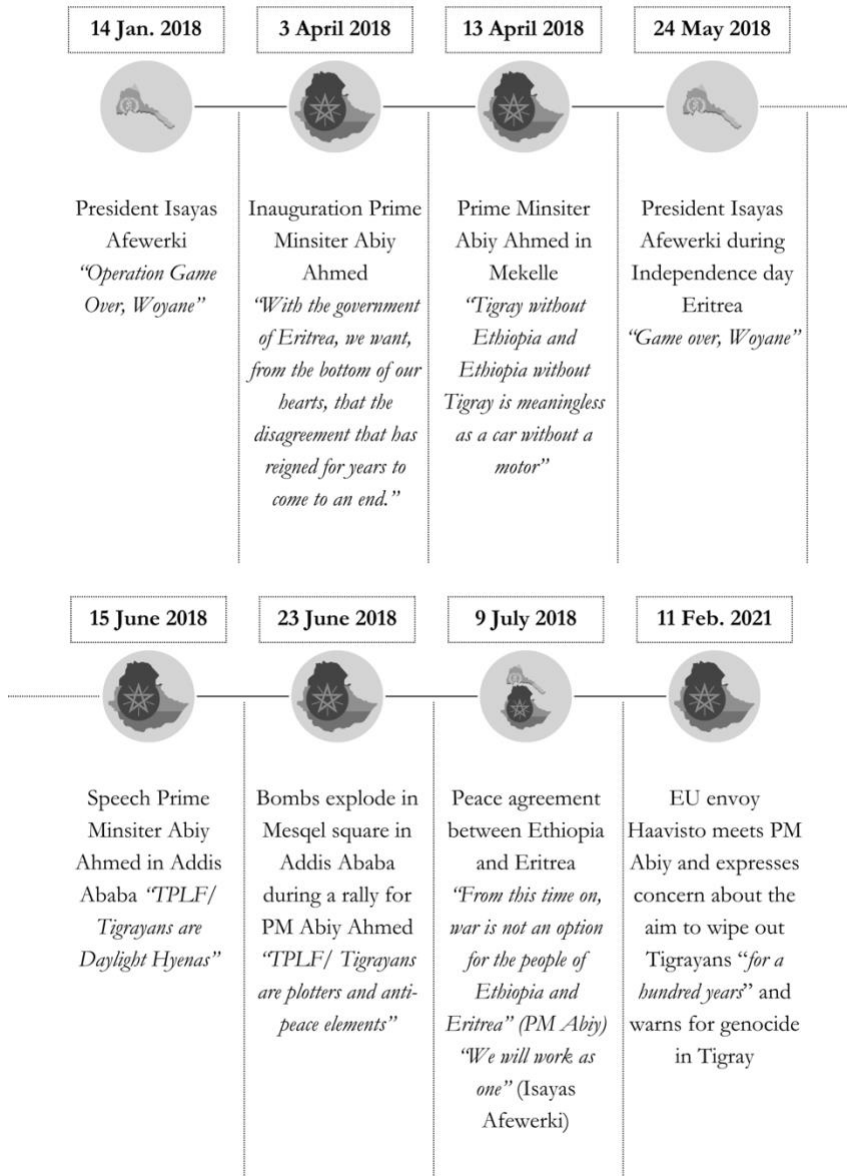


Figure 1.5. Overview of the operation ‘Game Over’ targeting Tigray

The statement “Game over, Woyane” by President Isayas of Eritrea critically signalled a policy against Tigray from 2018 onwards with a consequential outcome (Melicherová *et al.*, 2024; Equar & Tesfa, 2024). Moreover, when Eritrea left parts of Tigray in 2023 (after the Pretoria Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities was signed) the same slogan served as an explicit warning from Eritrea to Tigray that the war was not over (Tesfa, Van Reisen & Medhanyie, 2024). It is an unmistakable signature of the Eritrean position on Tigray.

The law enforcement operation of the federal government of Ethiopia immediately moved into full-fledged war. In the first three months, multiple massacres were perpetrated on civilians (Kahsay *et al.*, 2024), under cover of a siege and communication blackout, which prevented the massacres from being reported (Gebresslassie, 2024). The communication blackout also prevented the reporting of significant Eritrean involvement in the massacres (Gebremariam & Abrha, 2024). Nonetheless, Eritrea’s presence was denied during the first five months of the war (Tesfa, Van Reisen & Smits, 2024). The systematic nature of atrocities committed, the massacres, the sexual violence, and the destruction of the cultural heritage and religious sites are unparalleled (Kidanu *et al.*, 2024; Tesfa, Bächtold *et al.*, 2024; Tesfa, Bächtold, Gebremichael, Stocker, Van Reisen, 2024; Gebremariam & Abrha, 2024; Kahsay *et al.*, 2024). The human rights violations included the abduction of tens of thousands of Eritrean refugees to Eritrea, where they disappeared or were deployed on the battlefield in Tigray (Melicherová, 2024). In several studies it is identified that soldiers were operating under instructions to carry out the atrocities (Kidanu & Tefera, 2024; Melicherová, 2024; Kahsay *et al.*, 2024).

The message “This is what we Eritreans do” is delivered in a note found in the womb of a young woman who was raped (see Figure 1.1) and on banner on a truck to Eritrea, which was disseminated in social media understood as: “Game over, Woyane, this is what we Eritreans do” (see Figure 1.7) (Tesfa, Van Reisen & Medhanyie, Book 1, Chapter 10; Tesfa, Van Reisen, Book 2, Chapter 3; and Tesfa & Van Reisen, Book 2, Chapter 4). Kahsay (2024) emphasises that this should be seen as a political narrative, which is not necessarily

representative of a cultural narrative or distinction, given the similarity of values within the region, which includes Ethiopia, Tigray and Eritrea. A lack of human rights culture in civil education could explain the politically motivated cruelties perpetrated in the war.

The warning “Game over, Woyane” was accompanied by derogatory and dehumanising language, which characterised the war against Tigray in the hate-speech that was evident in media, in the graffiti left behind and in the way in which Tigray civilians were addressed as inferior or using hostile labels: ‘woyane’, ‘agame’, ‘junta’, ‘banda’, ‘day-time hyena’ (Geb & Tesfa, 2024; Tesfa, Van Reisen & Medhanyie, 2024; Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024b.; Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024c). Analysis of the hate speech used by soldiers invading Tigray can be traced back to words used in speeches by political leaders (Equar & Tesfa, 2024; Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024). This campaign was taken over by the highest level of the leadership in Ethiopia, particularly with the slogan ‘Tigrayans are daylight hyenas’. In a cultural frame the ‘hyena’ has a negative connotation, a ‘daylight hyena’ refers to an abnormal aggressive animal that needs to be tamed or killed because it is dangerous (Equar & Tesfa, 2024).

The hate-speech as well as disinformation often refers to historic situations or events (Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024). Hence, a timeline of the Eritrea-Ethiopia relations (see Figure 1.6.) is instructive to understand the references to political events that are used, among other things, in speech igniting hate and revenge.

The letter found in the womb of the young woman who was raped, referencing ‘09’ (Figure 1.1), is plausibly referring to the much-used accusation that Tigray motivated the United Nations (UN) Security Council sanctions against Eritrea in 2009. The sanctions were subsequently followed up with an investigation by a UN Special Commission on Inquiry on Eritrea in 2016 which found that the indefinite National Service constituted a crime against humanity. This left Eritrea increasingly isolated. Following the signing of the 2018 Peace Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the UN Security Council sanctions were lifted.

1998 - 2022: Tipping points of Eritrea-Ethiopia relations

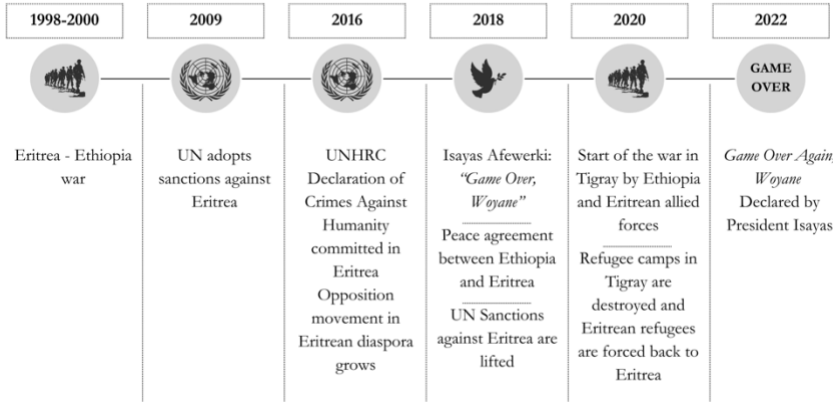


Figure 1.6. Overview of tipping points in Eritrea-Ethiopia relations between 1998 and 2022

The war in Tigray was certainly associated with overall Eritrea-Ethiopia relations. The references to important events, such as the UN Security Council sanctions, in the graffiti found in Tigray (Tesfa, Van Reisen and Medhanyie, 2024; Tesfa, Van Reisen, 2024b; Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024c) reveal a tone of political revenge from Eritrea on Tigray, with the Tigray population blamed for certain adverse events in Eritrea.

The findings across the various chapters support the conclusion by, among others, Melicherova, Van Reisen & Tesfa (2024); Gebreslassie and Van Reisen (2024); Geb & Tesfa (2024) and Tesfa, Van Reisen and Smits (2024) that the war in Tigray was prepared from January 2018 onwards with, at the very least, the strong involvement of Eritrean President Isayas – and potentially on the initiative of President Isayas.

In addition to revenge, a certain rivalry between Eritrea and Tigray was also noticeable in the discourse on the war. In several chapters slogans such as “we will bring you back 40 years”, “...50 years”, or “...100 years” reveal the intent to purposefully set Tigray back (Kidanu, Van Reisen, Stocker, *et al.* 2024; Tesfa & Van Reisen, 2024a; Tesfa, Van Reisen & Medhanyie, 2024; Kahsay, 2024). This expresses an intent to bring about a critical transition, to create a new situation,

a new state of an impoverished population, that will not be able to return to where it was before the war. The current aim of the Tigray leadership to ‘build back better’ is a brave attempt to defy the aim of the war, to prevent Tigray from recovering.



Figure 1.7. Game Over (@alex_temelso, 20 January, 2023)

Eritrean troops only left parts of Tigray in 2023. A picture was posted and shared on social media, “This is how we Eritreans are”, with a military vehicle carrying the Eritrean flag, with the slogan “Game over, Woyane”, which can be understood as a hidden transcript to attribute the war to Eritrea as a victory over Tigray (Tesfa, Van Reisen & Medhanyie, 2024).

Conclusion: The hidden transcript of genocide

A hidden transcript in the war is the blame placed on Tigrayans, in general, for the state of the political situation in Ethiopia. This narrative was a dominant discourse; Geb and Tesfa (2024) how a documentary broadcasted in 2018 coined ‘Tigrinya-speakers’ as ደብዳቤዎች (torturers), ነፍስ ገዳዮች (murderers), ሙሰኞች (corrupt), አሰቃይ (excruciates), መናፍስት (ghosts), ከሀዲዎች (traitors), ግብረሰዶማውያን (homosexuals) and ሰይጣኖች (devils) (Fana Television, 2018a, translation by authors). "We will not rest unless this enemy is stamped out. These people [Tigray people] are the enemy of the whole people of Ethiopia. They are the enemy of the Oromo, the enemy of Afar, and the enemy of Somali. We have to continue heroically struggling

against the enemy.”, declared the former President of the Amhara region in July 2021 (ETV, 25 July 2021). Following this statement, a second wave of mass arrests of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa began in July 2021. The declaration seems to reflect a desire for revenge for past grievances, expressed through hatred against Tigrayans.

Van Reisen, Kidanu, Stocker & Duncan-Cassell (2024) find expressions of hate contributing to the effeminisation of the people of Tigray, the process by which someone is made to take on characteristics traditionally associated with femininity. It is often used in a negative or pejorative sense, particularly when describing men or male-dominated spaces that are perceived as becoming more "feminine" in an attempt to portray them as weak, activating polarisation and dehumanisation, resulting in a perception that the lives in Tigray have no value.

The collective measures of the war – including the siege and communication blockade (Gebreslassie, 2024), the destruction of the health facilities (Medhanyie *et al.*, 2024; Niguse *et al.*, 2024; Taye *et al.*, 2024), undermining of humanitarian assistance (Kahsay, 2024), looting and destruction of farming (Nyssen *et al.*, 2024), destruction and looting of cultural, religious and economic assets (Gebremariam & Abrha, 2024) – severely undermined resilience (Stocker & Medhanyie, 2024). The result was famine (Kahsay, 2024; Kahsay & Medhanyie, 2024) and the loss of between 300,000 and 400,000 civilian lives, in addition to estimates of between 200,000 and 300,000 casualties on the battlefield (Financial Times, 2023).

The note left behind in the womb of a young Tigrayan woman: “We want the womb of Tigrayan women to be infertile”, speaks to the intent of genocide. It does not do this in isolation. Briefing EU heads of state after a visit to Ethiopia, the European Special Envoy, Haavisto, uses for the first time the term ‘genocide’ on the 11 February 2021. In the closing chapter of this book, Tefera finds that the intent of genocide can be deduced from the propaganda and hate speech perpetrated against the Tigray population, including the explicit desire that Tigrayans should cease to exist as a people. Tefera argues that the atrocity crimes committed with genocidal intent, should be investigated under the Rome Statute (1998), to ensure that

justice and accountability prevail. The conclusions of Tefera (2024) in this book, are in line with the New Lines Institute, which finds:

.. that there is a reasonable basis to believe that all sides (including the Ethiopian and allied forces, and the Tigrayan forces) committed war crimes in the course of the conflict, Ethiopian and allied forces — specifically, members of the Ethiopian National Defense Force, the Eritrean Defense Forces, and the Amhara Special Forces, among other groups — also appear to have committed crimes against humanity against Tigrayans, as well as acts of genocide.

These acts of genocide include killings, the infliction of serious bodily and mental harm, intentional measures to prevent births, and the deliberate infliction of conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of Tigrayans. The report finds, furthermore, that certain individuals also appear to have made statements amounting to direct and public incitement to commit genocide.

Irrespective whether this apparent conduct by the Ethiopian and allied forces was committed as part of a plan, or whether it was supported at senior levels, Ethiopia was obliged as a State party to the Genocide Convention to take effective action to prevent the commission of genocidal acts and to punish such acts if they occurred.

(New Lines Institute, 2024, p. 6)

In establishing the crime of genocide, the special intent (*dolus specialis*), to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group (Article 2 of the Genocide Convention), is more important than the motive behind the act. The special intent is a key element that distinguishes genocide from other crimes; it requires a clear intention to bring about the destruction of the targeted group.

As a result, the international community is obligated to take action, which may include initiating proceedings by States before the International Court of Justice under Article IX of the Genocide Convention. Additionally, States and the international community should work towards establishing an international, impartial, and independent criminal investigation. Where feasible, they should exercise universal jurisdiction to ensure that justice is served in relation to the numerous human rights violations in Tigray (Tefera, 2024).

Designation of genocide in the Tigray war

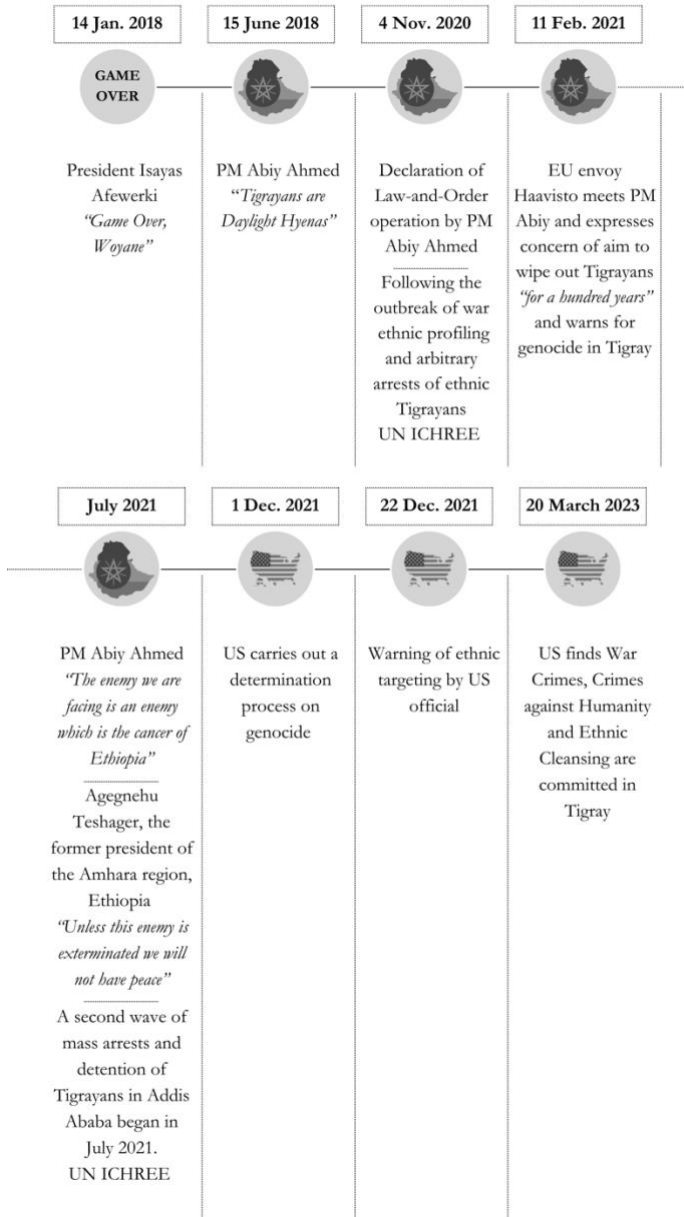


Figure 1.8. Critical points in the designation of genocide in the Tigray war

The events that have unfolded have fundamentally transformed the situation in Tigray, leading to significant changes in Ethiopia and the broader region. This reflects the concepts of hysteresis and panarchy (Stocker 2024), experienced in real life. Despite the communication blockade creating a digital black hole, individuals have shown creativity and agency to break through the imposed silence, and have demonstrate that forward-looking innovation can arise from desperate circumstances (Amare *et al.*, 2024).

Adapting to this new situation also exemplifies resilience. Just as nature continuously renews itself, we can take inspiration from Pan, with whom we started this chapter, who symbolises the potential for growth and regeneration. After the destruction of war, communities can be inspired to rebuild and restore, drawing strength from the resilience of the natural world. Pan symbolises a return to essential values and the natural state of being, encouraging healing, growth, and the celebration of life in the aftermath of tragedy.

Building back better is the courageous motto of the people of Tigray, and shows dignity and resilience in the face of the shocking genocidal actions and devastation that the people of Tigray were confronted with. This can inspire efforts to find harmony within oneself and between different aspects of society at large. To build back better may not mean to reconstruct what was before, but rather to create a new tomorrow, based on yesterday's hope, and in this encounter of the past with the future, inform a new sense of what life can bring today.

Today, understood as a mutable moment in the present, in which we can build, leaving what is behind, for a better tomorrow.

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Authors' contributions

The chapter draws on the work by Medhanyie (2024), and his reflections on the work of researchers during the Tigray war. It further draws on the conceptual framework presented by Stocker (2024) in her chapter on Resilience. The chapter further incorporates the work of all authors including Gebreslassie on the nature of the war and Tefera (2024), on the legal determination of genocide. Melicherova checked the critical junctures presented in the chapter. The first draft of this chapter was written by Stocker. Stocker also prepared the figures of the timelines. The second draft was written by Van Reisen. Tesfa reviewed the timelines and sources. Stocker and Van Reisen reviewed subsequent versions of the chapter. Munyaradzi Mawere reviewed the chapter, made editorial comments and suggestions.

Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance of the research was obtained from Tilburg University on “Cultural Dimensions of Meaning-making and Agenda-setting”, identification code: REDC 2020.139.

This chapter should be read in conjunction with the ‘Note on Content and Editorial decisions’ (Book 1).

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