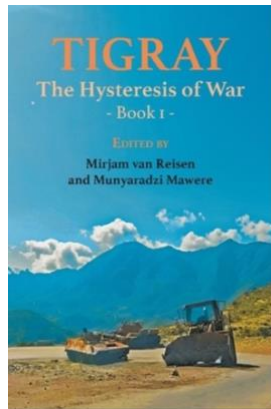


“Game Over”: Key Markers of the Tigray War in Redefining the Region

Kristína Melicherová, Mirjam Van Reisen & Daniel Tesfa

Chapter in:
Tigray. The Hysteresis of War. Book 1.



Cite as: Melicherová, K., Van Reisen, M. & Tesfa, D. (2024). “Game Over”:
Key Markers of the Tigray War in Redefining the Region. In: Van Reisen,
M. & Mawere, M. (eds.) *Tigray. The Hysteresis of War*, Volume 1. Langaa,
Bamenda. Pp. 41-95. Chapter URL:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385300576_Game_Over_Key_Markers_of_the_Tigray_War_in_Redefining_the_Region

Book URL:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385202452_Tigray_The_Hysteresis_of_War

The Note on Content and Editorial Decisions can be found here:

<https://raee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Note-on-Content-and-Editorial-Decisions-Van-Reisen-Mawere-Tigray-Hysteresis-of-War-Book-1-2024.pdf>

The list of figures in colour can be found here: <https://raee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Figures-Tigray.-The-Hysteresis-of-War-Volume-1-1.pdf>

Contents

Acknowledgements	xi
Note on Content and Editorial Decisions	xiii
Acronyms	xxii
Timeline of Key Events	xxv
Chapter 1: Yesterday We said Tomorrow: Hysteresis and Panarchy in War	1
<i>Mirjam Van Reisen, Araya Abrha Medbanyie, A.H. Tefera, Daniel Tesfa, Seife Hailu Gebreslassie, Kristina Melicherova, Joëlle Stocker & Munyaradzji Mawere</i>	
Chapter 2: “Game Over”: Key Markers of the Tigray War in Redefining the Region	41
<i>Kristina Melicherová, Mirjam Van Reisen & Daniel Tesfa</i>	
Chapter 3: From Hidden to Open War in Tigray: Structural and Proximate Causes	97
<i>Seife Hailu Gebreslassie & Mirjam Van Reisen</i>	
Chapter 4: Regional War by Design: The Involvement of Eritrea in the Tigray War	141
<i>Daniel Tesfa & Mirjam Van Reisen</i>	
Chapter 5: Weaponising the Media: Exploring the Role of Ethiopian National Media in the Tigray War	191
<i>S. E. Geb & Daniel Tesfa</i>	
Chapter 6: Famine as a Weapon in the Tigray War and the Siege	255
<i>Znabu Hadush Kabsay</i>	
Chapter 7: Bodies for Battle Fields: Systematic Use of Rape as a Weapon of War in Tigray	285
<i>Gebru Kidanu & Mirjam Van Reisen</i>	
Chapter 8: “Vultures were Circling the Areas”: Massacres During the Tigray War	333
<i>Daniel Tesfa, Matteo Bächtold, Rufael Tesfay Gebremichael & Mirjam Van Reisen</i>	

Chapter 9: Throwing Bodies into the Tekeze River: Assessment of Massacres 389
Daniel Tesfa, Matteo Bächtold, Rufael Tesfay Gebremichael & Mirjam Van Reisen

Chapter 10: ‘Followers of the Devil’s Code 666’: The Writing on the Wall of an Intent to Eradicate a People 425
Daniel Tesfa, Mirjam Van Reisen & Araya Abrba Medhanyie

Chapter 11: The Turning Points towards the Unequal Protection of Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia: From Protection to Abduction 473
Kristina Melicherová

Chapter 12: “He had Orders, and His Superiors were Outside”: Strategic Rape as Genocide in Tigray 533
Gebru Kidanu & A.H. Tefera

Chapter 13: Genocidal Intent in the Tigray War: Establishing Reasonable Grounds Based on Evidence561
A.H. Tefera

About the Authors and Editors 603

“Game Over”:

Key Markers of the Tigray War in Redefining the Region

Kristína Melicherová, Mirjam Van Reisen & Daniel Tesfa

ሰብስ ይወልድ እምበር መዓንጥኡ ይወፅእ?

Mankind is supposed to birth, not spill out intestines.

Abstract

The study examines the critical transition during the two-year Tigray war. It starts with the declaration by Eritrean President Isayas: “Game over” on 14 January 2018, in which he sets out a plan. The chapter identifies 10 critical events during the war: (1) 14 January 2018: President Isayas declares “Game over, Woyane”; (2) 9 July 2018: Peace Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia; (3) 4 November 2020: declaration of a law enforcement operation in Tigray by Prime Minister Abiy of Ethiopia; (4) June 2021: Operation Alula by Tigray forces; (5) July 2021: Operation Tigray Mothers and Sunrise by Tigray forces; (6) December 2021: Tigray forces halt offensive towards Addis Ababa; (7) June 2022: Mediation begins between Tigray and federal Ethiopian leadership; (8) August 2022: Coalition offensive against Tigray resumes; (9) 2 November 2022: signing of Pretoria Cessation of Hostilities Agreement; and (10) January 2023: Eritrean forces leave Tigray with signs declaring “Game over” and “This is what we [Eritreans] do.” The threat signalled by the policy of “Game over” continues to loom over Tigray.

Key words: Tigray war, critical junctures, key markers, tipping points, hysteresis, Ethiopia, Eritrea

Introduction

The events of war making and peace making may be regarded as tipping points that mark a transformation of a situation into an alternative socio-political ecosystem. In the Tigray war both events followed each other at breakneck speed. Although President Isayas Afwerki of Eritrea and Prime Minister (PM) Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia signed a peace agreement in 2018, for which PM Abiy received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019, both parties were involved in a ruinous war in northern Ethiopia from 2020 onwards. These events, and their order, need explaining, as none of these emerged without the possibility of alternative scenarios.

Anthropological research has shown that many societies around the world have been capable of living in peace in a ‘non-warring’ state or refrained from wars for generations (Fry, 2012). Despite the potential ability of societies to live in “peace systems” (Fry, 2012), past centuries have been marked by distinct destructive wars causing millions of casualties, as well as material and cultural losses. After World War II, numerous international instruments were put in place to prevent atrocities of war, which many countries have adopted as a preferable framework (Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 1949; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948; Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951). Despite preventive measures, many international and civil wars have been waged all over the world since then. Warfare has been modified by the use of modern technology and adapted to the faster and more destructive pace of the 21st century. The outbreak of war disturbs peace, stability, and the traditional functioning of society. It disrupts the social, economic, and political structures of the affected regions. Additionally, it can lead to widespread human suffering, displacement, and loss of life. The disturbance caused by war extends beyond the immediate conflict zone and can have far-reaching consequences on global relations and geopolitical dynamics.

Clausewitz, in his historical piece on war, writes that “war never breaks out wholly unexpectedly” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 78). It is rather a result of a myriad factors underlying political tensions, territorial

disputes, historical grievances, economic interests, power struggles, ideological differences, and ethnic or religious tensions. Interconnections within society are complex and not homogenous. Countries with a greater heterogeneity within the population are more likely to enter a war (Van Der Dennen, 1980). Tsing recognised that through interaction among individuals, originating from different cultural backgrounds, differences start to emerge which cause friction (Tsing, 2005). In this regard, Bourdieu (2000) introduced the concept of '*habitus*', which shapes an individual's perception of the social world, influencing their tastes, preferences, and behaviour. Friction arising from difference, leads to an interconnection showing certain qualities of either unstable, unequal, awkward or creative character (Tsing, 2005). The occurrence of friction bounces back informing habitus of involved individuals signalling some disturbance and non-smooth movement (Tsing, 2005). If the disturbance occurs within the system with low resilience it may lead to the formation of an alternative regime (situation).

This research aims to explore the interconnections between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray regional government, which have been generating friction in the political arena for many years. This friction came to a climax in November 2020 when a two-year war broke out. Complex history and intensifying political events escalated to a state of war with horrific social, cultural, and humanitarian consequences affecting millions of people. The implications of the Tigray war are considered in detail in the subsequent chapters of this book. However, to understand the specific implications of war, it is crucial to depict precise situational events that underlie all ramifications of war. Despite the vastness of the war in Tigray, there is still much that is not understood when it comes to the description of the developments which shaped its course. There is a lack of comprehensive analysis that examines the key events using an academic approach. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to identify and analyse the key events and factors that were markers in the outbreak of the Tigray war and to determine how these signifying events shaped the war until the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on 2 November 2022.

The main objective of this chapter is not to give answers as to why the war in Tigray was fought. Instead, a summary of the events leading up to, and occurring during, the war is provided in the form of descriptive research with a focus on the following research question: *To what extent can the theory of tipping points explain the changes of social-political systems ('regimes') during the two-year war in Tigray?*

Theoretical framework

Social and political systems – as diverse, complex, and dynamic structures – are prone to abrupt qualitative change leading to a new regime. An alternative regime is often the result of a critical transition characterised by a set of incremental processes evolving over time and triggered by an abrupt occurrence. A popular term that has been used in the literature to describe such a phenomenon is ‘tipping point’. Gladwell (2000) describes it as a critical point in which a compelling idea rapidly becomes indispensable for everyone. It is “that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behaviour crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire” (Gladwell, 2000).

An emerging tipping point does not occur in a vacuum. It is bound to a specific context (historical as well as contemporary), space and time. Situations in which incremental changes, occurring at a specific point of time, are met with reactions, which enhance these actions, leading to a new system change (Van Nes *et al.*, 2016). In an interdisciplinary literature review, Milkoreit *et al.* (2018) analysed the use of the term tipping point. Their analysis showed a multitude of working definitions of the tipping point across the literature, while using distinct thematic characteristics. Taking most represented themes into account, Milkoreit *et al.* (2018) defined the tipping point as:

[T]he point or threshold at which small quantitative changes in the system trigger a non-linear change process that is driven by system-internal feedback mechanisms and inevitably leads to a qualitatively different state of the system, which is often irreversible. (Milkoreit *et al.*, 2018, p. 9)

According to this definition, a tipping point is characterised by four essential attributes: (i) the existence of multiple stable states, (ii) non-linearity or abruptness, (iii) (positive) feedback, and (iv) irreversibility

or limited reversibility (hysteresis) (Milkoreit, 2022; Milkoreit *et al.*, 2018).

Alternative stable states refers to the existence of two distinct regimes that are demarcated by the tipping point itself. One regime is characteristic as a 'pre-tipping point' state and the second one as a 'post-tipping point' state. As Stocker (2024) describes in a theoretical chapter on 'Resilience Conceptualised through Transformation', the system moves to its alternative state when the original status quo is disturbed, and low resilience of the system does not prevent change occurring. Secondly, nonlinearity and abruptness refer to the fact that once the tipping point occurs, the process that follows is diametrically different to its preceding stage. Due to low resilience, there is a large disproportionality between cause and effect of the threshold that leads to a regime change. The third important component of critical transitions is the feedback loop. To overcome the status quo of a system, appropriate positive reactions need to occur to enhance the effect of the threshold leading to rapid change. Lastly, once the tipping point triggers an alternative regime it is difficult to reverse it to the state preceding the threshold occurrence. It is possible to reverse the alternative regime, even though it is usually a difficult process. Shifting the regime backwards, however, does not mean that all conditions are reinstated to the departure point. The distance between two thresholds is called hysteresis. All four components will be considered when looking at the tipping point and regime change analysed in the present study.

Concept of war

Within the body of literature, 'war' has been observed as a social phenomenon generating multiple definitions. One of the oldest and widely influential studies on war, by Clausewitz, defines war as "an act of force to compel out enemy to do our will" (1976, p. 75). He adds that it "is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means" (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 87). Kallen (1939) criticised Clausewitz's definition claiming it is too general and ambiguous (Van Der Dennen, 1980) and it "might apply also too much that is called peace" (Kallen, 1939, p. 379). The concept of war has been studied by many scholars from various

disciplines including political science, history, law, economics, as well as peace studies.

Most and Starr (1983) observed crosscutting elements that are covered by the many definitions of war. This involves situations where two or more parties with opposing intentions, objectives, and goals are placed in a condition where they are actively seeking their objectives. In such scenarios, one party is prepared to employ military force, while the other can resist it, thereby preventing immediate defeat (Most & Starr, 1983).

Not only is the definition of war a subject of study, but so is causality. Levy (1998), in his comprehensive assessment of war and conditions for peace, states that no consensus has been reached across the fields of war studies “as to what causes of war are” (p. 140). The theoretical framework proposed by Jobbagy (2009) on studying war in terms of causal nexus shows that due to the enormous complexity and the architecture of war, it is almost impossible to point out individual cases of causality. This has been confirmed by Van der Dennen’s thorough literature review on war concepts and definitions, in which he assessed that, due to multi-dimensionality of war, it is impossible to analyse the nature of war through a single cause theory (Van Der Dennen, 1980). As Clausewitz (1976) identified in his work, there are many historical, political and contextual events preceding war, which does not break out “wholly unexpectedly” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 78).

International humanitarian law (IHL), also known as the law of armed conflict, is a set of legal principles and rules that seek to regulate the conduct of armed conflicts and mitigate the impact on civilians and non-combatants. The primary objective of IHL is to balance the military necessities of warfare with fundamental human values, ensuring that even in times of armed conflict, certain humanitarian standards are upheld. According to the Geneva Conventions, IHL applies “to all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them” (Geneva Conventions, 1949), Article 2). Through adoption of the four Geneva Conventions in 1949, the term ‘armed conflict’ replaced the

traditionally used term ‘war’. Since then, the case law applied the terminology extensively. The landmark *Tadic* case ruled that:

An armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between States or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State. International humanitarian law applies from the initiation of such armed conflicts and extends beyond the cessation of hostilities until a general conclusion of peace is reached; or, in the case of internal conflicts, a peaceful settlement is achieved. (Prosecutor v. Tadić, 1995, para. 70)

For this chapter the terms ‘war’, ‘armed conflict’, and ‘conflict’ will be used interchangeably to refer to the occurrence of events in Tigray between 3 November 2020, and 2 November 2022.

Methodology

This chapter engaged in descriptive research (Saunders *et al.*, 2007) to produce a chronology of events occurring during the war in Tigray. Looking at the key events of the war, an etic approach is applied. This approach refers to an outsider’s perspective capturing observable situations or behaviour, but does not analyse the meaning (Haapanen & Manninen, 2023). The observer, in this case the author, is not part of the culture that is being studied, nor are they attempting to look at the study through the eyes of the people of a certain culture.

One part of the data for this chapter constitutes a systematic collection of the information published by Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA) since the early stages of the war in Tigray. The information was published in the form of daily Situation Reports as well as weekly news highlights. The information was collected through an internal network of informants who were directly in the field or who were closely mapping the situation on the ground. The primary data includes reports, briefings and media articles concerning the events occurring in Ethiopia as well as the broader Horn of Africa.

The write up of Situation Reports, its archiving, coding and labelling has been done with the support of research assistants. In total, 8,171 entries were included in the data set taken from daily Situation Reports. In addition, 522 entries relating to the Horn of Africa were identified from EEPA’s weekly news highlights and Horn highlights.

Each of the entries in the data sets were assigned a unique identifier, which were used for the purpose of the present analysis. The identifier ‘*SRC-number*’ refers to the dataset containing the Situation Report entries, while the identifier ‘*NH-number*’ refers to the dataset of weekly news highlights. The dataset was used with the explicit permission of the EEPA.

In addition, a desk search was carried out to complement the information from the main data set. The objective of the literature search was to understand how existing publications looked at events occurring during the two-year war period. Two search engines – Web of Science and Google Scholar – were used to look for the relevant literature using selected key words and phrases. Due to the vast number of search results, an exclusion criterion was applied to narrow down the literature pertinent to the problem statement as well as the research question of this chapter. After applying the exclusion criteria, 354 articles were screened based on title and abstract and further assessed for selection. At the end of the process, 17 publications were selected as relevant to this study. The objective of the desk research was to contextualise and triangulate the data from the Situation Reports. It was analysed comparatively with the main dataset, to verify information about events.

Some additional witness reports of four experts were used. These experts were closely following the Tigray war. The reports were used to understand the chronology of critical moments of the pre-war period.

Ethiopia and Eritrea in the pre-war period: Game over

The year 2018 will be considered a historic tipping point in the Horn of Africa. The year started with a speech by Eritrean President Isayas on 14 January 2018 broadcasted on the Eritrean government channel Eri-TV in which he made the announcement “Woyane [TPLF], game over” (Eri-TV, Eritrea [Official], 2018).¹ Woyane is used as a derogatory reference to the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)

¹ In this speech Isayas framed Woyane as “escaping forward”, frustrated by the public unrest. He stated that change in Ethiopia is inevitable. He stated: “Woyane and its sponsors are now worried too much” (Eri-TV, Eritrea (Official), 2018).

and Tigray people. It can also refer to people that President Isayas associates with the TPLF, even if they are not, such as refugees who fled from Eritrea or people whom Isayas associates with opposition to his regime in Eritrea. The phrase “Woyane, game over” (Eri-TV, Eritrea [Official], 2018) indicated a policy of Isayas to bring down the TPLF.

The year 2018 was certainly a significant period in modern Ethiopian history, as the balance in conditions had changed in the country. Ethiopia has faced large anti-government protests since 2015, with people calling for the enhancement of land, political and socio-economic rights (Addis *et al.*, 2020). The anti-government sentiment reached its peak in February 2018, when the then ruling coalition declared a 6-month state of emergency. Soon after these events, Abiy Ahmed Ali took over the role of prime minister of Ethiopia, which was welcomed with optimism and great expectations (Burke, 2018). In March 2018, following the resignation of his predecessor Hailemariam Desalegn, Abiy was nominated by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling coalition in Ethiopia. He officially took the prime minister post on 2 April 2018, with a vision to embark on a transformative journey for the country, which would be characterised by numerous changes, reforms, and new laws. PM Abiy introduced a new political philosophy, ‘Medemer’, which translates from Amharic as ‘addition’ and can be seen as the philosophy of coming together (Eritrea Focus & Oslo Analytica, 2021; Jima, 2021; Matshanda, 2022). In the first months of his leadership, his charismatic style was praised alongside several reforms such as the reconciliation with political opposition parties, lifting of the state of emergency, the release of political prisoners, the reform of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), as well as increasing female representation in state offices and forming a gender-balanced cabinet (Dahir, 2018; Mumbere, 2018; Oneko, 2018; Pichon, 2022).

When PM Abiy visited Mekelle on 13 April 2018 he famously spoke of the interconnection between Ethiopia and Tigray, with the famous expression: “Tigray without Ethiopia and Ethiopia without Tigray is meaningless as a car without a motor” (ትግራይ ብዘይ ኢትዮጵያ ድማ ብዘይ

ትግራይ ከምመኪና ብዘይሞተር ትርጉም የብሉን) (Fana Television, 2018a, min. 4:03-4:11; in iIMAGE eTHIOPIS, 2018).

Following the inauguration of PM Abiy on 2 April 2018, President Isayas repeated the threat of “Woyane, game over” on two occasions: the national liberation day of 24 May 2018 and Martyrs Day on June 20, 2018 (Ismael, 2018). PM Abiy used the term የቀን ጅቦች to describe TPLF or Tigrayans as ‘daylight hyenas’,² reported for the first time as on 15 June 2018 (Yethiopia News, 2018).

On 23 June 2018, there was a bombing in Meskel Square in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. A grenade was thrown at the podium where Prime Minister Abiy was. Shortly after the explosion the crowd attending the meeting shouted “down, down Woyane”. The suggestion was that Tigrayans plotted the assassination attempt (The East African, 2018). PM Abiy repeated the identification of “day-time hyenas” on the day of the bombing, 23 June 2018, on ETV (Fana Television, 2018b).³ A documentary by Yefitih Sekoka about the bombing made the accusation that the bombing was plotted by Tigrayans. The attack was associated in the media with the then recent announcement of the initiative of peace with Eritrea (The Guardian, 2018). Eventually, those who threw the grenade were captured and brought to court; none of the persons convicted were of Tigrayan origin (BBC, 2018; Kassa, 2021).

² Geb & Tesfa (2024), in chapter 5 of this book, explain the term as follows: “The term hyena in the Ethiopian idiomatic expression is used to portray someone who is barbed, egotistical and stingy or someone who stands against society to manipulate the values of human behaviour and morale for their own personal gain at the cost of society. Hyenas are usually active at night calendar, and people protect themselves through fencing their house, but anything left out at night is destined to be eaten by the hyenas. The term daylight hyena then portrays someone who shamelessly demonstrates non-human and callous behaviour in daytime, without being concerned that they may be seen by others. Thus, someone who is called a daylight hyena is considered callous and greedy, against which all necessary measures are taken to eliminate.” The use of this term ‘daytime hyena’ was later taken out of the online version of the speech by the broadcaster.

³ Ethiopia Broadcasting Corporation later removed the reference to ‘daylight hyenas’ in the online version (verified DZ, 2024; see <https://youtu.be/kuGKmcIkgT8?si=r7bLUQ0xzAmWIT7V>).

While the tension towards Tigray from the side of both President Isayas and PM Abiy kept growing, one of the most significant changes of 2018 was the peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which had been in a ‘no war no peace’ relationship for two decades (Abai, 2021; Eritrea Focus & Oslo Analytica, 2021; Pellet, 2021). The two countries fought a deadly war over disputed border areas between 1998 and 2000 resulting in the signing of the Algiers Peace Agreement in December 2000. The Algiers Agreement, however, was not fully implemented by Ethiopia, which kept control over disputed border areas. During his inaugural speech, PM Abiy stated that he was committed to resolving the historical differences with Eritrea. The official announcement that Ethiopia accepted the terms and conditions of the Algiers Agreement came on 5 June 2018, just a few hours after the state of emergency was lifted in the country.

The signing of the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia took place on 9 July 2018 in Asmara. There were several back-and-forth visits between PM Abiy and Eritrean President Isayas Afwerki. In September 2018, reinstating their mutual commitment towards peace, both leaders signed the Agreement on Peace, Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation between the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the State of Eritrea in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. However, a degree of confidentiality shrouds both the signed agreement and its implementation. Regrettably, no detailed information has been revealed regarding the precise vision discussed between the two leaders or the specifics of implementation. Nevertheless, the new step towards peace building was highly praised across all spectrums, including political leadership, media outlets and international community.

Historic moments were seen soon after the signing of the peace agreement when the borders between the two countries opened for the first time in decades (Eritrea Focus & Oslo Analytica, 2021; Pellet, 2021; Plaut & Vaughan, 2023). Video footage and pictures showed people from both sides of the border celebrating their reunification after years of separation (Ingber, 2018). Trade and economic exchange boomed as soon as the border crossing was reopened with merchants and business owners travelling to conduct cross border exchange. Witnesses described it also as a time when intelligence

reconnaissance persons from Eritrea went across to Tigray to collect detailed information and for some to embed themselves within the community (KAG, informal communication with Van Reisen, face-to-face, 4 February 2020; HG, informal message to Van Reisen, WhatsApp communication, 18 January 2024).

However, the sentiment of excitement did not last long. By the end of 2018, it was disclosed that Eritrea had closed the border crossings requiring travellers to show permit documentation and specific details for their travel (Ethiopia Observer, 2018). By April 2019, witness accounts confirmed the closure of all of the official border crossing points. There was no official communication, neither on behalf of the Eritrean nor the Ethiopian government, on the border situation (Shaban, 2019). Even though no concrete action or specific roadmap on the implementation of the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea was presented, the leaders of both countries continued with state visits during 2020.

Despite the initial efforts on the international and regional stage, PM Abiy started to face growing polarisation of society, internal tensions among various ethnic groups and violent clashes between them. Several ethnic groups, such as the Sidama people in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), were calling for self-determination and self-administration, which had been suppressed for a long time (Human Rights Watch, 2019b). Clashes and violence also led to a spike in the internal displacement, as people were forced to flee their land. Against the backdrop of rising tensions across Ethiopia, PM Abiy's popularity started to be questioned and slowly wear off (Human Rights Watch, 2019a). However, the internal strains were not an objection for the Nobel Peace Prize committee to announce PM Abiy as the winner for the year 2019. The main basis for receiving this award was the reinstatement of peace with Eritrea. This decision raised questions because one year after the signing the peace agreement with Eritrea, no concrete cooperation had materialised. Some conditions were even reversed, such as the re-closure of the border.

A few weeks after accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, the internal political scene was further challenged by the decision to merge four

member parties of the EPRDF into one national party – the Prosperity Party (PP). The aim of PM Abiy was to form a centralised Ethiopian government. This, however, did not resonate with all groups, which were hoping for the strengthening of regional autonomy. The ruling party of Tigray, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), did not endorse the creation of PP and refused to join it due to its illegitimacy. The decision of the merger had come less than half a year before the national elections were due to take place in May 2020. These elections were postponed by the new ruling party, as the world, including Ethiopia, had been battling the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the government postponed elections to August 2020. However, soon after, PM Abiy announced that the elections would be postponed indefinitely until the pandemic situation calmed down and conditions were more stable. This decision was endorsed by the parliament. The new ruling deepened the division between PM Abiy’s PP and opposition parties, namely the TPLF, as well as some nationalists from Oromia Regional State. The postponement beyond October 2020 was not accepted by the opposition parties, as the mandate of the federal government would have fallen outside the constitutional timeframe.

The TPLF viewed these decisions as a threat to constitutional integrity and autonomy. Tensions between the Tigray region and the federal government began to rise more rapidly. The Tigray regional government announced that regional elections would go forward to ensure that the governing body would have a legitimate constitutional mandate, which was due to expire in October 2020. Therefore, on 9 September 2020, the TPLF carried out its regional state council election in Tigray, securing 98% of the votes. Prior to the regional elections, the NEBE said that conducting separate elections in Tigray would be unlawful and deemed it unconstitutional. This was also confirmed by the House of Federation after the election took place.

In the weeks following the election in Tigray, the tension between TPLF and the Ethiopian government was mounting. The Ethiopian government took several deliberate actions against the Tigray region. These included stopping the supply of face masks for students in Tigray, while masks were distributed to the rest of the country. In addition, the federal budget subsidy of 10.4 billion Ethiopian birr was

cut off by the House of Federation, based on the illegality of the regional cabinet and assembly. The House of Federation ordered that the subsidies not be sent through the regional government, but rather directly to local administrations. Tigray officials also made it clear that the implementation of any policy imposed by the federal government would be rejected, as they would be deemed unconstitutional.

In October 2020, the Ethiopian National Defence Force appointed a new commander and deputy commanders of the Northern Command in Mekelle. One of the deputy commanders, Brigadier General Jamal Mohammed, was stopped at the Mekelle Airport and ordered to be sent back to Addis Ababa on 29 October 2020. TPLF also prevented the reorganisation of troops and weaponry from the Northern Command to other military bases outside of the region. On 2 November, Debretsion Gebremichael, then President of Tigray regional government, warned that the Tigray defence forces were on standby prepared to defend their region.

Outbreak of the war

The events that pre-empted the start of the war appear to be unclear, as there are opposing narratives portraying which of the warring sides fired first. However, the consensus suggests that the outbreak of the war dates to the night of 3 November 2020. On 4 November, the Ethiopian federal government declared a ‘law enforcement operation’ in response to an alleged attack by the Tigray regional government on a Northern Command army base in Tigray.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) says on 4 November 2020 the government of Ethiopia launched a military offensive against the TPLF, which was followed by attacks on the Northern Command of the ENDF by the TPLF on the same day. (SRC-4831, EEPA, 2021, SR 171)

PM Abiy claimed that it would be a swift operation and would be resolved in a matter of a few days.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a military offensive against the Tigray region on Wednesday night after reports of an attack on a Tigray army base. [...] Sounds of shelling and shooting have been reported in the Tigray region since Wednesday. A 6-month state of emergency has been declared in the region, and electricity, phone lines and Internet have been shut down. PM Abiy has accused

Tigray of manufacturing Eritrean uniforms amid concerns that neighbouring country Eritrea could get involved in the conflict. (NH-1, EEPA Weekly News Highlights, 6 November 2020)

The Tigray regional government rejected claims that the attack on Northern Command on 4 November 2020 was the first act of aggression starting the war, stating that it was provoked by the actions of the Ethiopian government. Before 3 November 2020, information trickled out that PM Abiy allegedly planned to arrest top officials and civilian leadership of the Tigray regional government. The Northern Command division of the ENDF received an order to be on standby mode. Some ENDF troops were even airlifted into Asmara, Eritrea, before the start of the conflict. On the evening of 3 November 2020, two Ethiopian cargo planes arrived in Mekelle stating that they were bringing new banknotes. However, according to witness accounts, this was a cover up plan to transport commando troops in order to capture members of the Tigray leadership:

TPLF stated it was provoked on 3 November when the Ethiopian government sent commandos in an Antonov and/or cargo plane, under pretext of delivering new banknotes, allegedly with the intention to capture the Tigray regional government, which was assembled in a meeting in Planet hotel in Mekelle. (SRC-1047, EEPA, 2021, SR 44)

The Ethiopian government denied these accusations claiming that the cargo planes were part of a standard and scheduled plan of old currency replacement. The account of a witness close to the Tigray regional government recalled the events prior to the declaration of the law enforcement operation. EEPA reported on this account in February 2021 as follows:

A spokesperson close to the Tigray regional government, which is now in hiding, gave a different reading of what had transpired. In this version, the war in Tigray effectively started on November 3, 2020. That day, Addis Ababa sent a cargo plane with Special Forces to Mekelle, under the pretext of transporting bank notes. According to the Tigray regional government, they had intelligence that the Special Forces were instructed to arrest the Tigray state government leaders, meeting in a hotel in Mekelle. The tensions reportedly occurred in the context of the federal government seeking to redeploy the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), stationed in Tigray. The Tigray regional state government

opposed the redeployment of the Northern Command because the constitutional power of PM Abiy had ended on October 5, 2020, and, as elections had been postponed, due to the Covid-19 crisis, the Prime Minister was heading a caretaker government. The attempted arrest of the members of the Tigray government was foiled and the regional government sought to gain control over the Northern Command of Ethiopian government forces. (SRC-2233-2237, EEPA, 2021, SR 89)

Since the first hours of the outbreak of the war, reports of open-armed fighting were reported on several fronts causing casualties.

Conflict intensifies despite international appeals for de-escalation. Various media have reported on the escalation of the conflict and heavy fighting in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, while the experts, civil society and the international community have been urging for the immediate cessation of hostilities and peaceful dialogue. [...] The media has reported that the first days of heavy fighting have resulted in casualties. (NH-4, EEPA Horn Highlights, 11 November 2020)

Together with proclaiming the law enforcement operation, PM Abiy declared a 6-month state of emergency and ordered a communication shutdown, which disrupted phone lines, the Internet, as well as electricity in the region. As noted in the EEPA Situation Report, “Communication from Tigray is blocked. The phone lines have been cut and the Internet is switched off. The banks are closed and there is no electricity” (SRC-147, EEPA, 2020, SR 7). A total communications blackout, which was enforced on the Tigray region throughout the whole period of the war, caused difficulty in obtaining verifiable information from the ground. Strong opposing narratives, which caused division between supporters of each of the sides, manifested themselves through misinformation campaigns disseminated on social media platforms:

Misinformation and disinformation constitute a risk to further exacerbate the conflict. Older images displaying missile defence systems and fighter jets were manipulated and spread on social media. Videos showing armed conflicts in Armenia were falsely attributed to fighting between federal and Tigray military forces. The spread of misinformation is intensified by the shutdown of Internet and phone lines which limits reliable communications to and from the Tigray region. (NH-8, EEPA Horn Highlights, 11 November 2020)

Both sides accused each other of spreading disinformation to promote their propaganda and ideological ideas of covering and dismissing the evidence of perpetrated acts.

Ethiopian diplomats warn against the widespread campaign of “misinformation and fake news” stating: “the current operation is neither a civil war nor directed against innocent Tigrayans. The Federal Government is trying to bring to justice treasonous TPLF leaders.” (SRC-482, EEPA, 2020, SR 21)

The control over information and the narrative was a key mechanism in the war.

Involvement of various forces

The ENDF invaded Tigray initially, it claimed, for a law enforcement operation, with a domestic purpose. However, in reality the coalition of the ENDF was broader. Below the involvement of Eritrean and Somali forces is discussed, as well as the involvement of Amhara special regional forces and militia (Fano).

The participation of Eritrea

The news about the presence of foreign troops in Tigray had already trickled out from the early stages of the war. That moment was crucial for understanding that the conflict in Tigray was an international, rather than internal, conflict between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, as was narrated by media reports: “Conflict has evolved from a civil internal conflict to a regional conflict with the confirmed exchange of hostilities between Tigray/Ethiopia and Eritrea” (SRC-42, EEPA, 2020, SR 3).

The Eritrean presence on Tigray soil was announced by the Tigray regional government:

Claims made by Tigray President Debretsion that Eritrea is involved in the war [...], [it was] denied by Eritrea, but local activity [was] reported from within Eritrea. (SRC-1, EEPA, 2020, SR. 1)

The prominent role in active combat and the deliberate attacks on civilians was attributed to the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), which were reported to be present in Tigray from the start of the war. “A witness reported that on 4 November 2020, Eritrean soldiers already

entered the town of Gerhusernay, near the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, where it started killing civilians” (SRC-2231, EEPA, 2021, SR89)

In the first couple of months, new witness evidence emerged which suggested that the alliance between Ethiopia and Eritrea was a pre-planned strategy against Tigray:

The attack by Eritrean troops happened in the night. Therefore, it would appear to have been part of a pre-planned attack. The official reading by the Ethiopian Government is that it started a law-and-order Operation after Tigray regional troops attacked the Northern Command on 4 November 2020. (SRC-2232, EEPA, 2021, SR 89)

Several reports showed that the Eritrean President Isayas took internal steps to pave the way for the active participation of Eritrea in the war that was about to break out:

Concern [was] raised that the war in Tigray was pre-planned: “Outlines of a plan were revealed when information was leaked about a meeting held by President Isaias just prior to the outbreak of the war.” Eritrean President Isaias “brought together his closest confidantes on the eve of the Tigray war. He said that Eritrea had to accept that it had a small economy and a lengthy Red Sea coast that it cannot patrol on its own. He suggested forming some sort of ‘union’ with Ethiopia, at least in terms of economic co-operation and maritime security.” (SRC-1590, EEPA, 2021, SR 65)

The account of Mesfin Hagos, the former Minister of Defence in Eritrea, who has been living in exile, aligned with these reports claiming the early involvement of Eritrea in the combat:

Former Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defence Forces Mesfin Hagos, now in exile, claims that Eritrean soldiers have been involved in the fighting from the start and that the Eritrean people have been involved in the war without their knowledge or permission. (SRC-289, EEPA, 2020, SR 14)

Already, before the war, the Ethiopian government transferred some ENDF military units to Eritrea from where they would have been well positioned to attack the Tigray region from the northern side which borders Eritrea: “Sources state that Ethiopia is making use of airports in Eritrea for the deployment of troops” (SRC-51, EEPA,

2020, SR 3). This strategy was recognised as a secret game plan between PM Abiy and President Isayas:

Mesfin Hagos, relates that “in the run-up to the current conflict, a large number of Ethiopian elite units had slowly been trickled into Eritrea as part of a security pact between Abiy and Eritrean president Isaias Afwerki.” He states that: “Hidden from public view at an ad hoc base in Gherghera, in the outskirts of Asmara,” in Eritrea, “these units were expected to be the hammer and the Northern Command the anvil to strike out of existence the TPLF.” According to Hagos the “TPLF pre-empted this scheme in what it called ‘anticipatory defence’, which forced both Abiy and Isaias to improvise leading to the eruption of conflict.” (SRC-401, EEPA, 2020, SR 18)

The fact that Eritrea was involved in the war was rejected and denied by both the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments.

Evidence of Eritrean involvement as AFP journalist reaches Humera (Tigray) reporting that “multiple people told that during the battle they witnessed mortar bombs whistling in “from the north”, meaning Eritrea. Ethiopia’s government denies TPLF claims that Eritrea is involved in the fighting, but acknowledges making use of Eritrean territory. (SRC-98, EEPA, 2020, SR 6)

However, active collaboration between Ethiopia and Eritrea had been proven, with many records including video footage and witness accounts. In the first days of the war, video footage showed an exchange of weaponry between ENDF and EDF:

A video has been received that shows the hand-over of artillery between Ethiopian Northern command troops and Eritrean troops on 5th November 2020 in North Eritrea near the border with Ethiopia. (SRC-5261, EEPA, 2021, SR 184)

In addition, several cargo flights were detected moving between Asmara and Addis Ababa suspected of transporting weaponry:

A number of cargo flights from Ethiopia Airlines between Addis Ababa, Asmara (Eritrea) and several destinations inside Ethiopia and Eritrea have been identified, believed to have transported weapons in November and December 2020 as part of the war effort of the two countries against Tigray. (SRC-5262, EEPA, 2021, SR 184)

Eritrean troops committed extensive crimes, including massacres, extrajudicial killings, looting and abuse of the civilian population in

Tigray. Alongside massacres, widespread sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, was committed against thousands of Tigrayan women and girls. Sexual violence became a weapon of war committed by Eritrean as well as Ethiopian soldiers. Sexual attacks were accompanied by verbal and other physical abuse. Kidanu & Van Reisen (2024) and Kidanu & Tefera (2024) describe in this book the systemic use of sexual violence in Tigray in greater detail.

Somali troops

Alongside Eritrean troops, Somali soldiers were also reported to have participated in the Tigray war. Based on the bilateral agreement between Somalia and Eritrea, some of the Somali troops were sent to Eritrea to receive their military training. Troops that were present in Eritrea were mobilised and sent to fight alongside the ENDF allied troops. Thousands of soldiers were estimated to be sent to Eritrea for training, however, the exact numbers of soldiers sent to the war and those who survived are inconclusive:

Reported from Somalia “that 1000 (young) soldiers are missing (presumed dead). Parents are now planning to organize protests.” A report circulating from a Somali MP speaks of 3,000 Somali troops participating in Ethiopia’s Tigray war. The troops were sent to Asmara in Eritrea to receive training. According to one report, only 180 of them survived. It is reported that one of them contacted his family from Mekelle, saying that he was injured in the war. (SRC-1459, EEPA, 2021, SR 60)

This was also confirmed by the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker:

The Special Rapporteur also reported that the office received reports of Somali troops being transported by Eritrea to the frontline in Tigray. (SRC-4520, EEPA, 2021, SR 161)

The Somali government dismissed the claims made by international actors that the Somali military was involved in the Tigray war. Many parents of the soldiers who had been sent to Eritrea did not hear about their whereabouts. Parents raised these concerns with Somali authorities and organised protests demanding an investigation and the return of their sons. Parents further claimed that their children were sent to Eritrea without their consent or being informed. Receiving

pressure from the parents, the Somali Prime Minister pledged to establish a committee of inquiry to investigate those claims:

The Somali Prime Minister has established a committee to investigate the complaints of parents who say they have not heard anything from their children who have been sent to Eritrea for military training and deployed in Tigray, without the knowledge of approval of the parents. (SRC-4725, EEPA, 2021, SR 168)

Even just receiving military training in Eritrea was described as harsh and cruel by soldier witnesses who underwent training:

Reported that youth who had been involuntarily taken from Somalia to training camps in Eritrea underwent cruel treatment. Speaking to the media they recalled the harsh conditions at the camps as they were subject to constant torture. “Some of us were executed”, one of the youth stated. (SRC-5339, EEPA, 2021, SR 186)

The training and involvement are one illustration of the preparations for the war and its regional dimension.

Amharan troops

The Amhara Special Forces (ASF), Amhara militia as well as Fano militia (ethno-nationalist militia of Amhara region) were actively involved in targeting the Tigray region alongside ENDF allied forces. Numerous reports confirmed their involvement since the early stages of the war. In addition, the ASF were complicit in helping the ENDF prepare for the attack on Tigray before the official proclamation of war.

The Amhara Chief Commissioner of Police, Abere Adamu, has given a speech on the involvement of Amhara forces in the conflict with Tigray. According to him, Amhara Special Forces played an important role in positioning ENDF forces prior to the conflict. The President of Amhara was allegedly also aware that a conflict was going to take place. (SRC-1106, EEPA, 2021, SR 46)

Heavy deployment was noticed along the border between the Amhara and Tigray regions before 4 November. This gave a head start to ENDF allied forces to enter the region and take strategic positions.

The Amhara Commissioner also said that “deployment of forces had taken place in our borders from east to west. The war started that night, after we have already completed our preparations” implying that the involvement of the Amhara special

forces had been prepared and was well on the way before the start of military operations on 4 November 2020. (SRC-1108, EEPA, 2021, SR 46)

Amhara forces carried out attacks on villages and cities in Western Tigray and alongside the border areas, taking over the administration of the captured areas.

Massacres

Already in the first days of conflict, ENDF – together with the allied forces, EDF and ASF – committed numerous attacks on the Tigrayan civilian population. “Cities of Shire and Aksum have been attacked by the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), Amhara Special Force, and the Eritrean army” (SRC-23, EEPA, 2020, SR 2). The attacks were directed towards people as well as their property. Military troops started to loot and destroy houses, stealing food, cattle as well as crops.

One of the first massacres reported after the outbreak of the war occurred in Mai Kadra between 9 and 10 November 2020. Mai Kadra, a town in Western Tigray near the Sudanese border, was part of disputed areas between the Tigray and Amhara regional administrations. Hundreds of civilians were killed, and many others displaced.

After the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported that at least 600 civilians were killed on November 9th in Mai Kadra by militias loyal to the regional government, AFP notes that different stories are being told by victims and that the full extent of the event is unknown. (SRC-164, EEPA, 2020, SR 8)

Witnesses from both ethnic groups reported that the opposing side had committed violations against them. The fighting started around mid-day on 9 November with Tigray youth and militiamen reportedly attacking ethnic Amhara. By way of retaliation, Amhara militia and civilians started to attack the ethnic Tigrayan population. Tigray fighters fled from Mai Kadra. Hence, on the next day, 10 November, ENDF and allied forces took control of the town. Tigrayans who survived the revenge killings and did not flee were detained in local detention facilities. As further revenge for the Mai Kadra attacks, ASF and Amhara militias continued to persecute Tigrayans in other places

in Western Tigray. Entire villages were destroyed, and the local population were forced to leave their homes:

By the 9th tensions were running high in Mai Kadra after the fighting had been coming closer. One Ambara said that he saw many young Tigrayans walking around with knives and machetes and checking people's identification documents. Shortly after, Tigrayan mobs started attacking Ambara living in the city, targeting mostly men. Seven Ambara residents said that members of the town militia were with the mobs and appeared to be directing some of the killings. Militiamen and local police were also blocking roads leading in and out of Ambara neighbourhoods, shooting at people trying to escape. The ENDF and other forces entered the city uncontested on the morning of the 10th. Tigrayan fighters had by then fled the town. Attacks on Tigrayans in the city started that afternoon. Ambara militiamen then systematically started driving Tigrayans out of Western Ambara. Entire villages have been destroyed, cities and highways have been renamed. Many Tigrayans have also been executed. Ambara soldiers rounded up men, put them on trucks, and brought them to Tekeze River, where they were executed. There were instances of both Ambara and Tigrayans helping each other escape while the massacres were taking place. (SRC-4629-4634, EEPA, 2021, SR 164)

On the same day, the border town of Humera was bombed and shelled with artillery shot from Eritrea. Residential areas as well as hospitals were hit leaving many people dead and injured:

This confirms reports received that "Several large artillery bombardments were allegedly carried out in Humera between November 9-11 2020. Witnesses report that shells were launched from Eritrea, devastating residential areas and destroying a hospital. The Ethiopian army and regional Ambara forces also allegedly then took control of Humera, where they killed civilians and looted buildings." (SRC-1340, EEPA, 2021, SR 55)

News about massacres committed across Tigray was constantly trickling out. The patterns were similar across all attacks, EDF, ENDF, ASF, as well as Fano militias indiscriminately shelled villages often executing whole families. Churches and mosques were not spared from attacks either as they became places of shelter for many civilians trying to hide from the military and militias. Here are some examples reported by EEPA. "Nine priests killed in the Church in Adi Aweshi, Tembien, Tigray, by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops" (SRC-678, EEPA, 2020, SR 29). Another report from 19 December

documented 150 civilians being massacred by Eritrean troops in the town of Edaga Hamus:

Killings occurred in Edaga Hamus, a small town in Tigray. Eritrean soldiers reportedly killed approximately 150 civilians, including a priest and women seeking refuge in a church, located 4 km to the west of Marieam Dengelat. The town and some rural villages (Maimegelta, Dengelat, Tsa'a and Hangoda) are under the control of Eritrean forces. The military is slaughtering the animals. People are starving to death. (SRC-724, EEPA, 2020, SR 31)

Between 28 and 29 November 2020, hundreds of civilians hiding in the Church of St Mary of Zion were massacred in Aksum city:

The church was full, and 1,000 people may have been in the building or the compound surrounding it. A confrontation happened after which people were forced to come out on the square. The troops opened fire and 750 people are reported to have been killed. (SRC-1283, EEPA, 2021, 53)

The blackout made it extremely difficult to understand the circumstances of these massacres and, while the EEPA Situation Reports were the first to publish on many of these, including the massacre in Aksum, they were only published several weeks after the events took place, as it was extremely difficult to obtain reliable information on these events.

Capturing of Mekelle and the retreat of TDF

Over the course of November 2020, the ENDF, with the significant collaboration of Eritrean and Amhara troops, was able to capture and take control of several strategic towns and cities. These included Shire, Aksum, Adwa, Adigrat, Chercher, and others. The TPLF had been contesting the statements by the federal government saying that most of the cities were under the control of Tigray forces:

PM Abiy issued a statement saying that the ENDF holds Dansha, Humera, Shire, Dhiraro, Aksum, Adwa, Adigrat, Alamata, Chercher, Meboni, Korem and other places. According to the TPLF, the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amharic forces are moving through these cities but are not holding all of them. (SRC-81, EEPA, 2020, SR 5)

The next target for ENDF was to take hold of the regional capital, Mekelle. As the Ethiopian forces progressed from all fronts towards

the capital, PM Abiy announced that the last phase of combat was at hand. He gave a 72-hour ultimatum to the TPLF to surrender otherwise he would order an attack on the city:

Ethiopian PM Ahmed Abiy issued a statement on Twitter on the elapsing of the 72-hour ultimatum, stating that the Ethiopian National Defence Forces have been directed to commence the “third and final phase of the Rule of Law operations”. (SRC-160, EEPA, 2020, SR 8)

On 28 November 2020, Mekelle was bombed by the ENDF for several hours, resulting in them taking control of the administration of the capital:

Air missile attacks and bombardments in Mekelle (morning), and PM Abiy Ahmed claims that Mekelle is under the control of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and that the military operation is complete. The Regional Government of Tigray claims that ENDF does not control Mekelle at this time (28 Nov). (SRC-214, EEPA, 2020, SR 11)

The Tigray regional government as well as the TDF withdrew from Mekelle and went into hiding in the Tigray mountains. The leadership officials hid in the mountains without the possibility of any effective communication. “According to an analyst, the entire leadership of the TPLF is intact. Over 70 of them have retreated to the mountains. Only two have been arrested” (SRC-760, EEPA, 2020, SR 32).

Together with the TPLF leadership, a wave of civilians flooded out of towns and cities. Thousands crossed the border with Sudan in the first days of the war and others were displaced internally. Displacement caused people to hide in different urban settings or rural areas, including the mountains that crosscut the Tigray region. The capture of Mekelle gave the federal government new momentum. While PM Abiy stated that the fighting was over and that no civilians had been hurt in the process, the reality on the ground did not correspond with those claims. Atrocities had been committed daily.

By the end of December 2020, the TPLF started to call upon the Tigray youth to join the TDF to retake the region from the power of

the federal government. Calls for mobilisation were further repeated in January 2021:

A leader of TPLF, who is the former deputy mayor of Addis Ababa, addressed the youth in Tigray on Facebook: “In our current struggle for self-determination, the role of the youth is very important. So, any youth who can and wants to join the struggle, shall join Tigray defence forces directly or shall go to members of the Tigray regional government leadership and fight in an organized manner to free Tigray. (SRC-915, EEPA, 2020, SR 39)

The mobilisation tactic worked for the TDF, as the military was building manpower and preparing a new strategy throughout the first months of 2021. In February, the Tigray government issued terms and conditions for resolving the conflict and silencing guns. This included the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray, respecting the territorial integrity of the region, establishing full humanitarian access to and from Tigray, and reinstating the elected regional government of Tigray:

Reported that Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces have engaged in new intensive attacks in Eastern and Southern Tigray that include aerial bombardment and artillery shelling. (SRC-3124, EEPA, 2021, SR 118)

By April 2021, it was an established and recognised fact that the coalition of ENDF, Amhara and Eritrean troops were involved in the attack on Tigray: “Isaias seems to be doing what he wants with Ethiopia,” said Dr Daniel Mulugeta, an Ethiopian research associate at SOAS in London in the Financial Times (Schipani & Pilling, 2021). The Tigray regional government was mobilising its youth to defend its regional territory.

TDF regains control

Having mobilised Tigray youth, the TDF started several military operations in mid-2021 to respond to the invasion: Operation Alula Abanega, Operation Tigray Mothers and Operation Sunrise. These are described below.

Operation Alula Abanega (recapturing of Mekelle and unilateral ceasefire)

Operation Alula Abanega marked a pivotal point in the Tigray conflict, representing the first substantial TDF offensive since the ENDF captured Mekelle. The lead-up to this operation was characterised by a significant concentration of the ENDF in central Tigray by June 2021, with rumours circulating of an imminent ENDF and EDF offensive to decisively defeat TDF forces.

On June 18, the TDF launched an attack on several fronts across the Central, South-Eastern, and Southern zones of Tigray:

Fierce fighting between Tigray Defence and ENDF allied forces was reported on various fronts in Tigray. In recent days, Tigray's Defence Forces have launched a strategic offensive against ENDF allied forces. The operation has been ongoing since 18 June. The operation has covered many parts of the Central, Southeastern, and Southern zones of Tigray. (SRC-4812-4815, EEPA, 2021, SR 171)

The TDF confirmed the first success of this offensive by destroying multiple divisions of the ENDF as well as EDF forces. The TDF claimed to capture commanders, logistic operators, as well as staff members of those divisions. The spokesperson for the TDF announced that the success was due to the new operation, Alula Abanega, launched by the TDF:

The spokesperson also told Dimtsi Weyane (DW) International that ENDF's 31st and 11th divisions were completely destroyed by the operation of Alula Abanega. (SRC-4819, EEPA, 2021, SR 171)

Subsequent days brought similar results. The TDF's unexpected successes led to the capture of key towns and the surrender of the opposing forces. "Reported that dozens of Eritrean troops have surrendered to Tigray Defence Forces near Axum, Central zone of Tigray" (SRC-4852, EEPA, 2021, SR 172). As the operation was progressing on all fronts, the TDF was strategically positioning to take over Mekelle:

It is reported that Operation Alula by Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) has resulted in the defeat of Ethiopian allied troops in many areas from Abiy Adi to the river Giba. TDF is close to the outskirts of Mekelle. (SRC-4884, EEPA, 2021, SR 173)

On 28 June 2021, the TDF successfully re-captured the city of Mekelle, prompting the ENDF, the interim regional government imposed by the federal government, as well as the EDF to withdraw from Mekelle and other major cities across Tigray:

The ENDF troops have completely pulled out from Mekelle and major towns in Tigray. ENDF and Eritrean troops, which were fleeing Mekelle, have been told to surrender by the Tigray Defence Forces near Mekelle. [It was] reported that the majority of ENDF troops who were surrounded at the outskirts of Mekelle while fleeing have been captured by Tigray defence forces. (SRC-4986-4988, EEPA, 2021, SR 176)

It was reported that the capital of Tigray, Mekelle, was controlled by the TDF. The government of Tigray issued a statement confirming the successful end of the Alula Abanega operation which led to the full reinstatement of the government and control over the capital.

The Government of Tigray states: "First and foremost, we would like to share the great news to the entire people and friends of Tigray that our beloved capital city, Mekelle, is now under the complete control of the Tigray Defence Forces and the legally elected Government of Tigray is back in its rightful place." [...] "This stunning victory was made possible as a result of the lightning operation named after the great African General Ras Alula Aba Nega." (SRC-4982 & 4983, EEPA, 2021, SR 176)

The Ethiopian government claimed that the withdrawal of ENDF forces was a planned move, as they did not want to interfere with the start of the farming period. The new developments prompted PM Abiy to declare a unilateral ceasefire. "The Ethiopian government has declared a unilateral ceasefire in the Tigray region – 8 months after Prime Minister Abiy sent troops to oust its leadership" (SRC-4980, EEPA, 2021, SR 176). The Tigray leadership responded claiming it would agree to a ceasefire if the conditions that were previously set, such as the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray, were met by the federal government.

As the war over Tigray's capital unravelled in June, Ethiopia went through general elections, which had been previously postponed. On 21 June 2021, Ethiopians cast their votes across all regions except Tigray. The PP of PM Abiy Ahmed won the election by a great majority, securing 410 seats in the House of Representatives.

Operations Tigrayan Mothers & Sunrise

On 12 July 2021, the TDF launched a new operation named ‘Tigrayan Mothers’ on the southern as well as south-western fronts. The first offensive focused on areas of Beri Teklay and Bala as well as towns Korem and Alamata:

The TDF have reportedly captured the towns of Korem and Alamata, while Amhara and ENDF forces are continuing to flee from Tigray. Other reports suggest that the TDF has retaken the entirety of Southern Tigray in Operation Tigrayan Women [meaning Tigrayan Mothers]. (SRC-5313, EEPA, 2021, SR 186)

On 13 July, Alamata was successfully captured by the TDF taking control of the city from the hands of the Amhara administration. “The offensive by the Tigray Defence Forces in Southern Tigray named ‘Operation Tigrayan Mothers’ has succeeded in liberating the Southern city of Alamata” (SRC-5343, EEPA, 2021, SR 187). Soon after, it was reported that Mai Tsebri was also controlled by the TDF. Fighting between the TDF and allied ENDF and Amhara troops was carried out in Western Tigray. Reports showed that captured weaponry, trucks, tanks, and military vehicles from the opposing side were used by the TDF. “Pictures of TDF forces travelling in captured Amhara police cars are surfacing online. This follows new reports of Tigrayans capturing many ENDF and Amhara weapons and vehicles” (SRC-5314, EEPA, 2021, SR 186). Days after the start of the Operation Tigrayan Mothers, PM Abiy revoked the unilateral ceasefire calling on Ethiopians to defend themselves from a ‘junta’.

The fighting soon expanded beyond the borders of Tigray with the TDF passing to the Afar and Amhara regions. According to the Tigray regional government, the main objective was to dismantle the ENDF and allied forces without making any territorial claims over the neighbouring regions. The Afar administration confirmed that their forces joined the allied militia and were fighting against the TDF. On the south-western front the TDF was fighting with the ASF trying to advance to the Amhara region. This was successful from about 20 July when the TDF gained control over areas between Mai Tsebri and Adi-Arkay (SRC-5416, EEPA, 2021, SR 189).

By 27 July, Operation Tigrayan Mothers was completed with the TDF confirming their success in capturing, dismantling or killing ENDF forces in other regions beyond Tigray:

The Central Command of Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) told Dimtsi Weyane (DW) International that “Operation of Tigrayan Mothers” has been successfully completed. In the Operation of Tigrayan Mothers, over 30,000 ENDF soldiers and forces from various regions including Amhara, Somali, Sidama, Afar and Oromia, have been killed, injured and captured. The operation was held from 12-27 July 2021 on three fronts (Afar, Southern and Western Tigray). Over 17,852 were killed, 11,342 were injured and 944 were captured. (SRC-5592-5594, EEPA, 2021, SR 194)

In August, the TDF made further advances deeper into Amhara region, taking control over Weldiya town and moving towards Dessie. “Reported that Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) fully controls the town of Weldiya, North Wollo in the Amhara region and is advancing north towards Mersa, a town between Weldiya and Dessie” (SRC-5717, EEPA Situation Report No.197, 9 August 2021). PM Abiy issued a statement calling upon Ethiopians to join the ENDF in the fight against Tigray (SRC-5768, EEPA, 2021, SR 199).

The success of the TDF in taking control of Mekelle as well as a majority of strategic places across Tigray was met with retaliation by the Ethiopian government against ethnic Tigrayans. A new round of ethnic profiling and surveillance was seen across all parts of Ethiopia from June 2021:

Witnesses told The Associated Press (AP) that thousands of Tigrayans are being detained and their businesses closed in cities across Ethiopia in a new wave of ethnic targeting by Ethiopian authorities. The detentions follow the dramatic turn in the war last month when resurgent Tigray forces marched into the regional capital, Mekelle and routed Ethiopian soldiers out of Tigray. (SRC-5353 & 5354, EEPA, 2021, SR 187)

The previous wave of detentions was seen soon after the outbreak of the war in November 2020. The houses of Tigrayans were searched by the police without any warrant. Many were accused of supporting the Tigrayan ‘junta’ and were detained. Others were rounded up in public spaces just because they were heard speaking Tigrinya or after

being forced to show their ID. Hundreds of businesses owned by Tigrayans in Addis Ababa were closed.

ENDF allies strike back

In late August 2021, it was announced that the ENDF and Amhara had regained some power and re-captured several towns. At the same time Eritrean troops seemed to advance in pursuit of regaining their position around Adigrat, Adi Goshu and Humera (NH-27, EEPA Weekly report, 27 August 2021):

The ENDF and Amhara militias have recaptured several towns. These include Kimir Dingay and Nefas Meewcha. There are suggestions that the TDF withdrew from the area. It is reported that some 800 Afar soldiers under the Eritrean flag have joined fighting in Barable near Samare in the Afar region and that fierce fighting is going on at the Chifra front in the Afar region. (SRC-58755 & 5876, EEPA, 2021, SR 203)

In October 2021, Abiy was sworn into the office of the Prime Minister for a second 5-year term. In the process of the cabinet reorganisation, PM Abiy appointed a new chief of the Tigray interim administration, Abraham Belay, who also took the office of defence minister.

Meanwhile, the news started to suggest that the ENDF was getting ready for a new round of offensives as the end of the rainy season was approaching. Troops, logistics and weaponry were mobilised. The reports showed that many young Ethiopians, including high school students, joined the army (NH-73, EEPA Weekly News Highlights, 8 October 2021).

Major offensives by ENDF and allied forces were launched across all major fronts in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions:

There has been a heavy use of jet fighters and drones during this newest offensive. Little is known about the progress of the offensive as journalists are not allowed in the area and phone lines are down. (NH-78, EEPA Weekly News Highlight, 15 October 2021)

A planned offensive seemed to be repelled by the TDF in the first days of the renewed fighting. The Tigray leadership was claiming

success on all fronts while predicting that this round of battles would not last long:

The Ethiopian government has not yet commented on the new offensive, however, the Tigrayan officials are claiming that they are holding their ground. Getachew Reda, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) spokesperson, told Reuters that the fight is ongoing and the "number of casualties is staggering". He later said in a tweet that the Tigrayans had captured "commanding heights on all fronts". Tigrayan General Tsadkan, who has previously commanded the Ethiopian armed forces said "The enemy has been preparing for months, and so have we". He added that it would be a decisive moment for the country, with military and political ramifications. According to him, the fight is unlikely to last very long, probably a matter of weeks. (NH-78, EEPA Weekly News Highlight, 15 October 2021)

The situation was tense with Tigray as the theatre of fierce fighting in all of its territory and with all routes blocked for the TDF, including to Sudan. The TDF was not able to replenish weapons or ammunition and relied on tactics to take these over from enemy troops.

TDF and OLA operations and forming a coalition

While maintaining control in central Tigray, the TDF now launched a counter-offensive, which aimed to take control over the cities of Dessie and Kombolcha, two strategic cities in the Amhara region. Both cities lie on the vital road between Addis Ababa and Djibouti.

There have been heavy clashes between the Tigrayan Defence Force (TDF) and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) near Dessie and Kombolcha in Amhara. The TDF has been making slow progress against the city, which is seen as an important hub in the region. It has many connecting roads, and is one of the important junctures between Addis Ababa and Djibouti. Many ENDF-allied fighters remain in the area, and have been fighting fiercely with the TDF. With fighting nearing, many civilians have started to flee. The regional airport has also been closed due to the fighting. (NH-96, EEPA Horn Highlights, 26 October 2021)

When the expansion of the TDF became more prominent, the ENDF started to bombard the Tigray region on 18 October 2021. It focused on dismantling telecommunication stations and other important infrastructure. However, residential areas were also hit by aerial strikes:

[T]he Ethiopian air force has been conducting a series of air strikes against Mekelle, the capital of Tigray. The Ethiopian government says that the strikes target industrial and telecommunications infrastructure. However, several people have told journalists that the strikes have also hit residential areas. According to the United Nations, three children were killed and 20 others wounded in the Monday [18 October 2021] strikes. (NH-87, EEPA Weekly News Highlights, 22 October 2021)

In pursuit of Dessie and Kombolcha, TDF forces created an alliance with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) forming a joint front. Ties between the TDF and OLA had started since mid-August 2021.

A spokesperson for the OLA has said that the group is working on an alliance with the TDF. He told the Associated Press that “The only solution now is overthrowing this government militarily, speaking the language they want to be spoken to.” He continued by saying that “We have agreed on a level of understanding to cooperate against the same enemy, especially in military cooperation”. He did however acknowledge that there were significant historical barriers, and that some doubt remained. (SRC-5570-5572, EEPA, 2021, SR 199)

At the beginning of the negotiations, the new alliance was considered as a political move rather than a military one (SRC 5801, EEPA Situation Report 200, 14 August 2021). The TDF was a much stronger army, however the Oromo region is ethnically the largest population in Ethiopia and, therefore, had the potential to bring more manpower. The grudge against the federal government and PM Abiy’s cabinet was mounting in Oromia:

Oromia is seeing a ‘brutal crackdown’, and thousands of opposition politicians were imprisoned. The two main Oromo Political parties decided to boycott the election in protest, leaving Abiy’s party uncontested. (SRC-4871, EEPA, 2021, SR 172)

By 30 October, the TDF had captured both strategic cities with a plan to capture the highway vital for the delivery of supplies. One of the main priorities for the TDF was to overcome the humanitarian blockade imposed by the federal government.

The cities of Dessie and Kombolcha, 400 km from the Ethiopian Capital Addis Ababa, have been captured by the TDF, following the Ethiopian offensive against the TDF. TDF is now moving to Mile, 160 km from Dessie, from where it would control the highway between Addis Ababa and Djibouti. The highway is critical for

the transport of humanitarian goods to Tigray, which is suffering from famine as a result of the siege of the Ethiopian federal government. The Tigray government says that its key concern is the relief of the siege around Tigray, and opens the way for humanitarian aid to reach the Tigray region. Capturing Mile would open the road to Djibouti and break the federal government's blockade on Tigray by allowing convoys through. The highway is also critical for the import and export of Ethiopian goods. Reportedly, ENDF has left Semera, the capital of the Afar regional state. Semera is located 64 km north of Mile. The collapse of government forces in Dessie and Kombolcha also opens the road for TDF forces to move on Addis Ababa. The Tigrayans have linked up with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and formed a joint front. The OLA is the regional army of the Oromo regional state and has also been declared a terrorist organisation by the Federal Government. The OLA has seized several key junctures between Addis Ababa and both cities. (NH-110, EEPA Horn Highlights, 2 November 2021)

With the important highways controlled by the TDF, it became clear that the next stage was an advance on Addis Ababa. On 5 November 2021, the alliance between the TPLF and the OLA was formalised by aligning an agreement between the two parties. The political alliance was formed in the spirit of working together towards a transitional government that would replace PM Abiy (NH-121, EEPA Weekly News Highlights, 5 November 2021).

Amid rapid advances on the front made by the TDF, the Ethiopian government announced a nationwide state of emergency on 2 November 2021. It also announced that anyone suspected of having any relations with the TPLF would be subjected to a house search or potential arrest. Ethnic profiling experienced a new wave. Media surveillance was put in place to prevent any pro-TPLF news from being published.

The administration also said that it was conducting house to house searches and arresting people suspected of relations with TPLF. There have been many concerns, including from Human Rights Watch, that Ethiopian security forces have been ethnically profiling Tigrayans and detaining them without cause. The Minister of Justice has further announced that publications and broadcasts favourable to the "terrorist group" (TPLF) will be banned. [It is] reported that new fresh mass arrests of ethnic Tigrayans are taking place. (NH-111, EEPA Horn Highlights, 2 November 2021)

Addis Ababa started to make preparations for a potential invasion by the TDF-OLA alliance. Civilians were called to defend the city together with security forces. A new task force was established in the capital which was composed of “members of the National Security and Intelligence Service (NISS) Federal and Addis Ababa Police as well as Oromia Police” (NH-112, EEPA Horn Highlights, 2 November 2021). PM Abiy announced that he would personally join the fight on the frontline. Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister, Demeke Mekonnen, took over the responsibilities of the PM office in the absence of Abiy.

By 30 November 2021, it had been announced that the ENDF had re-captured the town of Chifra in Afar. In the following days, significant progress was made on the front in Amhara. The ENDF, ASF and Fano alliance took control of several major cities including Dessie and Kombolcha on 6 December. The TDF claimed that it withdrew from its positions due to the strategic redeploying it forces:

Ethiopian forces have captured large sways of territory over the last week. In some places, they advanced 130 km in a few days. The government has also announced the recapture of several major areas. The two strategic towns of Dessie and Kombolcha were recaptured on Monday, while Gashena was taken at the end of last week. Lalibela, an important cultural town, was also recaptured by Ethiopian forces last week. (NH-212, EEPA Horn highlights, 7 December 2021)

On 20 December 2021, Debretsion Gebremichael announced the withdrawal of the TDF from regions outside of Tigray stating the openness for peace and prioritising the protection of civilians and the delivery of vital humanitarian aid to the region (NH-237, EEPA weekly highlights, 22 December 2021). Following the announcement of the withdrawal of the TDF, a series of aerial bomb strikes were carried out in December 2021 and throughout January 2022. Residential areas were hit by bombs affecting hundreds of people:

The last weeks have seen an increase in airstrikes carried out in the Tigray region. According to reports, hundreds of people, including women and children, have been killed in these strikes. The United Nations says that at least 108 civilians have been killed in Tigray since the start of the year 2022. (NH-251, EEPA Horn Highlights, 18 January 2022)

At the beginning of 2022 there was no end in sight for the war in Tigray.

Temporary ceasefire

As the security situation outside of Tigray was basically under the control of the federal government, the Ethiopian parliament lifted the state of emergency in mid-February, which had initially been imposed until May 2022. On 24 March, the federal government announced a ceasefire to allow for humanitarian aid to be securely delivered to the Tigray region. The TPLF accepted the truce stating that the processes concerning politics and humanitarian aid needed to be separated:

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) accepted the proposal for ceasefire, noting: "while the Government of Tigray is committed to the success of this endeavour, we would like to note that linking political and humanitarian issues are unacceptable. Nonetheless, the people and Government of Tigray will do their best to give peace a chance." (NH-411, EEPA Weekly highlights, 25 March 2022)

In the days following the ceasefire, there were reports that Eritrean troops were still present and active in Tigray. The first humanitarian aid started to flow into the region on 2 April 2022. Despite aid trucks delivering several rounds of goods and supplies, the rate with which the aid was flowing in was not adequate to address the needs of the Tigrayans (NH-502, EEPA Horn Highlights, 9 May 2022).

The ceasefire was mostly held over the months of May and June. However, tensions were visible and, in many instances, voiced by political actors accusing the opposing side of obstructing the truce. In addition, Eritrea had been adding fuel to the fire by supporting anti-Tigray social media campaigns, which echoed messages of the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRC-5957-5959, EEPA, 2022, SR 206). There were reports of open clashes between the TDF and the EDF in the border areas around Badme (NH-518, EEPA Weekly Highlights, 13 May 2022). On 24 May 2022, Eritrean brigades launched attacks on north-western Tigray, which were successfully reversed by the TDF. In retaliation, the EDF shelled the town of Sheraro, not sparing civilians (SRC-6109-6112, EEPA, 2022, SR 213).

By the end of June, the Ethiopian government announced that preparations were made for peace negotiations, with the African

Union (AU) as the main facilitator. However, the mediation by the AU was refused by the Tigray regional government, stating that there was a close “‘proximity’ of its envoy Olusegun Obasanjo to the Ethiopian prime minister” (SRC-6480, EEPA, 2022, SR 229). Instead, the Tigray government proposed peace negotiations to be facilitated by Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, with the presence of international actors such as the European Union, United States and AU (SRC-6480, EEPA, 2022, SR 229). Both sides expressed their commitment to peace. However, the conditions that each party had during the negotiation process seemed to be not acceptable to the opposing side.

Fighting resumes

On 24 August 2022, fighting between the TDF and ENDF restarted along the southern border of Tigray. Prior to the resumption of the battle, increased movement of the ENDF, ASF and Fano militia was observed.

Residents along the border told Reuters that they heard heavy weapons since the early morning of 24 August and there had been a movement of Ethiopian soldiers, Amhara Special Forces and volunteer Fano militia in the past two days. As of yet, it remains unclear who instigated the hostilities. Both sides are accusing each other. No independent verification has taken place. (SRC-6979, EEPA, 2022, SR 253)

The Tigray government announced that Eritrea was also involved in resumed fighting, giving support to the ENDF, and a new front opened in Eritrea (SRC-7047, EEPA, 2022, SR 256). There were multiple offensives launched by the ENDF and the EDF alliance in Northern Tigray. Soon after, Eritreans were seen to fight the TDF on multiple fronts, including Western Tigray where a fierce battle was held over Dedebit town.

According to a Tigray representative, a key battle is being fought between Eritrean forces and TDF in Dedebit in Western Tigray. Tigray Spokesperson Getachaw Reda said on Twitter that Eritrean forces are also taking up offensive positions on multiple fronts such as Rama, Tserona, Zalambessa and Dallol. (SRC-7207 & 7208, EEPA, 2022, SR 263)

All border areas around Tigray, as well as neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions, witnessed fierce fighting causing large casualties on all sides with hospitals flooded with wounded soldiers and civilians.

The ENDF has reportedly captured Adi Arkay in the Amhara region [...] Heavy fighting is taking place in many different border areas. TDF fighters are engaging Ethiopian forces from Sudan, Fighting is taking place on the Tekeze River, on the B30 Highway towards Debarke, on the Abergele front, and around Kobo in Amhara. The TDF is also engaged with Eritrean forces in the North around Shiraro. Heavy fighting is reported between TDF troops and Eritrean troops on the border with Tigray. (SRC-7209-7212, EEPA, 2022, SR 263)

Alongside land operations, this period was characterised by numerous airstrikes carried out by the ENDF in Tigray, with a particular focus on the Mekelle area. Residential areas, a kindergarten, the area close to the Mekelle General Hospital, as well as Adi Haqi University campus of Mekelle University were hit by airstrikes. “An Ethiopian airstrike killed at least seven people in Mekelle on Friday 26 August. UNICEF has said that the strike hit a kindergarten” (SRC-7050, EEPA, 2022, SR 256). Ayder Referral Hospital in Mekelle faced an overwhelming influx of wounded patients hit by drone strikes.

The chief executive of Ayder Referral Hospital, Dr Kibrom Gebreselassie, said on Twitter that an area near the Mekelle General Hospital was bombed by a drone attack around midnight. He said casualties were arriving at Ayder hospital and that the extent of the damage and casualties was not clear. (SRC-7089, EEPA, 2022, SR 258)

Renewed fighting and drone attacks significantly reduced the delivery of humanitarian aid. On 11 September 2022, the Tigray government issued a statement expressing openness to AU-led peace negotiations with the presence of international observers. “The Government of Tigray also said a comprehensive negotiated ceasefire and an all-inclusive political dialogue should follow after the cessation of hostilities” (SRC-7277, EEPA, 2022, SR 266). However, in the days following the statement the military was still engaged in fighting on all fronts. The EDF was reported to be mobilising more troops including reservists to launch a large-scale offensive in Tigray.

Tigray spokesperson Getachew Reda says Eritrean forces have launched a full-scale offensive on all fronts along the border – all the way from Tekeze through to Irob.

He said heavy fighting is going on in May Kubli, Zban Gedena, Adi Awala, Rama, Tserona and Zalambessa fronts. He added that ENDF's eastern command, members of the Northwestern command and 3 commando divisions have also been deployed along with the Eritrean forces. He said Eritrea is deploying its entire army as well as reservists. (SRC-7413-7416, EEPA Situation Report No. 272, 20 September 2022)

Another full-scale offensive was reported on 10 October 2022. Deploying tens of thousands of units, the ENDF and EDF attacked north-eastern Tigray and fighting took place in Zalambessa, Rama, Tserona and Adigrad (SRC-7734-7738, EEPA, 2022, SR 286). By 18 October the Tigray government confirmed that the ENDF had captured Shire, followed by Alamata and Korem towns in the subsequent days.

Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

On 25 October 2022, AU-led peace negotiations started in South Africa with both sides (Tigray and Ethiopia) represented by envoys. Eritrea did not participate in the peace negotiations. The Ethiopian government was represented by national security advisor Redwan Hussien and Getachew Reda represented the TDF. The talks were facilitated by former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, former Kenyan President, Uhuru Kenyatta, and former Deputy President of South Africa, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), United States and UN representatives sat in as observers of the peace process.

Negotiations started with a hopeful and positive demeanour: “There is hope that the outcome of an immediate ceasefire and long-lasting end of fighting should be a real possibility” (SRC-8049, EEPA, 2022, SR 299). According to the original schedule, the talks were due to finish by 30 October. This was, however, extended to 1 November due to the complex nature of the process: “According to a diplomatic source talking to The Continent, the peace talks are complicated by the absence of Eritrea” (SRC-8101, EEPA, 2022, SR 301).

On Wednesday, 2 November 2022, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF leadership signed the Agreement for Lasting Peace through

a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities (CoH Agreement) ending the two-year deadly war (SRC-8125, EEPA, 2022, SR 302). Both sides pledged to be proactive in the implementation of the agreement. Following the signing of the CoH Agreement, parties issued a statement recognising the loss of lives, physical and material damage.

The delegation leaders referred in their joint statement to the tragic loss of lives and livelihoods. They reaffirmed the sovereign integrity of Ethiopia. The statement mentions the reintegration of the Tigray combatants in the Ethiopian army. The collaboration with humanitarian agencies. The establishment of a framework for the settlement of differences, and an accountability mechanism. The parties agree to stop propaganda, voices of divisions and hate, and to restore public services. (SRC-8134-8136, EEPA, 2022, SR 302)

Based on the provisions of the CoH Agreement, the ENDF and federal institutions would be allowed to enter Mekelle to be part of the restoration of service (SRC-8153, EEPA, 2022, SR 303). Another meeting was pledged to be held specifically on the disarmament of heavy weapons, to be finalised within 10 days after the signing of the CoH Agreement (SRC-8155, EEPA, 2022, SR 303). Article 7 expected the TPLF to discontinue any collaboration with any other armed forces. The CoH Agreement further considered the establishment of a new Tigray interim regional administration, which would govern the region until the regional election would take place (SRC-8157, EEPA, 2022, SR 303). The Ethiopian government pledged to revoke the designation of the TPLF as a terrorist group and to undertake a judicial process to hold the perpetrators of crimes committed during the war accountable. Further, “The ENDF shall safeguard the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security of the country from foreign incursion and ensure that there will be no provocation or incursion from either side of the border” (SRC-8158, EEPA, 2022, SR 303). To monitor the progress on implementation of the CoH, both parties pledged that a joint committee including IGAD and AU would be established (SRC-8160, EEPA, 2022, SR 303).

Game over – forever

Eritrean troops were pictured leaving parts of Tigray on 20 January 2023. They had signs on their vehicles reading in English “Game

over”, signalling to international audiences their objective vis à vis this war. The Tigrinya text reads: ከፖዘኒ ኢና, which is likely to have signalled to Tigray people indexing a Tigrinya interpretive model⁴: “That’s what we [Eritreans] do, or we [Eritreans] showed you what we can do, this is our ability to do whatever” (see Figure 2.1).

The text on X (formerly Twitter) with the picture reads: “This is EDF (Aradom) leaving Tigray after the defeat of TPLF with our motto Game Over”. The context dictates the meaning. The message can be understood as being directed at the Tigrayans watching them leave. Aradom here means ‘hero’ – referring to the victory of the EDF, but also referring to the underlying meaning of being feared and creating panic and capable of terrorising.⁵

⁴ The Tigrinya and Amharic model of indexing meaning is called Qine or Qene, referred as wax and gold, which presents ambiguous layers of hidden meanings within text format. The obvious meaning is referred as the wax, which hides a deeper meaning, referred as the gold.

⁵ A number of Tigrinya-speaking persons from Tigray and Eritrea were requested to interpret the text (Informal Communication, WhatsApp with Van Reisen, 6 February 2024). One message reads: “ARADOM = “he terrorized them”. It refers to what the Shabiya think they did against the Weyane, i.e., terrorise them....” and another one “It is a name of person which means someone makes terrified other.” And “Aradom meaning make them panic and terrorized.” As well as “when I translate it they were saying, we are hero ever.” Also: “The Tigrigna version says: “We (Eritreans) are like this” ... which means they what they say... Game over”



Figure 2.1. Eritrean troops retreating from West Tigray with the motto: Game Over (Alex T, 2023)⁶

This text can be interpreted as a sign of victory of succeeding the original objective announced by President Isayas in January 2018, as well as a threat, that the Eritreans can come back, understood in the hidden transcript of the meaning, that this is what “Eritreans do”. This shows that the withdrawal does not signify a return to the situation prior to the war, but that a new situation has emerged with the threat of military intervention permanently hanging over Tigray.

Discussion: The hysteresis of the Tigray war

The analysis shows that the outbreak of the war brought a radical regime shift (situation) within Ethiopia and Tigray. A humanitarian crisis, foreign forces fighting against Tigrayans, massacres committed against civilians, hate speech, as well as sexual violence as a weapon of war were some of the realities that occurred during the two-year war (D’Costa, 2022; Fisher, 2022; Istratii, 2021; Pellet, 2021; Pichon, 2022; Pohjonen, 2022). The moment when PM Abiy declared a law enforcement operation on 4 November 2020, the system in place was

⁶ The picture was posted by an apparent supporter of the Eritrean campaign in Tigray (@alex_temelso, 20 January, 2023, on Twitter (X) with the title: “This is EDF (Aradom) leaving Tigray after the defeat of TPLF with our motto Game Over” (published on: https://x.com/alex_temelso/status/1616422065715961860). Accessed 27 May 2024)

tipped, leading to a new and unexpected alternative regime. We refer to this moment as the ‘outbreak of war’. It has become clear that the law enforcement operation was not going to be as straightforward and speedy as PM Abiy announced (Eritrea Focus & Oslo Analytica, 2021; Plaut & Vaughan, 2023). With the Eritrean forces involved in the planning and participating in the attacks, the declaration of the law enforcement operation far exceeded a ‘simple’ law enforcement process.

As the theory of tipping points suggests, four prerequisites are essential for defining an occurrence as a threshold or tipping point (Milkoreit, 2022; Milkoreit *et al.*, 2018). All four attributes will be considered in the following sub-sections and looked at from the perspective of the findings.

Existence of multiple stable situations

Ethiopia is a country with a rich history that has witnessed several challenges on the political scene, as well as among ethnic groups living in the country (Eritrea Focus & Oslo Analytica, 2021; Pellet, 2021; Plaut & Vaughan, 2023). When looking at contemporary history, it has been identified that the period from 2018 to November 2020 was important in seeing incremental steps that would lead to (what would be known in the future as) a threshold and a new regime. With Abiy Ahmed sworn into the office of Ethiopian Prime Minister, 2018 was a year of hope for many. In particular, the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, bringing the two decades of conflict between the countries to an end, was seen as a great step towards stability in the Horn of Africa. However, the year also started with an announcement by President Isayas of Eritrea, in January 2018, of: “Game over, Woyane” to the Tigrayans, and the initial enthusiasm for the Peace Agreement deflated as the newly opened borders between Ethiopia and Eritrea closed without explanation (Eritrea Focus & Oslo Analytica, 2021; Jima, 2021; Plaut & Vaughan, 2023).

The content of the 2018 Peace Agreement was never revealed to the public in detail. The negotiations between PM Abiy and President Isayas did not involve any of the Tigray leaders, even though the conflict concerned the border regions between Eritrea and Tigray. The relationship between PM Abiy and President Isayas has been

questioned by many observers (Abai, 2021). Reading between the lines, over time the pact came to be seen as part of a conspiracy against the Tigrayans and the elimination of the TPLF (Abai, 2021). The political relationship between the TPLF and PM Abiy's cabinet saw a downward spiral in 2019 and 2020. Disagreement on key issues, such as the elections and the merger of ruling political parties into the Prosperity Party, built up tensions. Disagreements and accusations occurred on the political scene before the outbreak of war. This changed into a militarised system in which disagreements between the opposing sides were underscored by military offensives.

The findings revealed that grave violence of various characters was committed against the people of Tigray by the ENDF, EDF, ASF as well as the Fano militia. Estimates of the number of deaths in the war went as high as 700,000 people (Pilling & Schipani, 2023). Within the new war regime, disputes between political opponents had severe and concrete consequences for the civilian population and all societal structures. Looking at the theory of tipping points, two stable situations, which are delineated by the tipping point itself, are present in this study. The outbreak of war splits regimes into a 'pre-tipping point' state and a 'post-tipping point' state with 4 November 2020, being the threshold.

Non-linearity or abruptness

After the outbreak of the war, all essential services in Tigray were disrupted or destroyed (Fisher, 2022; Name *et al.*, 2021; Pellet, 2021; Pichon, 2022; Plaut & Vaughan, 2023). These included health care, school systems, banking, communication services, food and supply chain, industries, the non-government sector, as well as small business structures. From one day to the next everyone had to adjust to the new reality, which would become the new 'normal' for the years ahead. The vastness of the consequences that the tipping point caused was unpredictable. Based on the findings, the outbreak of the war resulted in a new regime with a qualitatively different state in comparison to the 'pre-tipping point' regime.

Domino effect towards a new situation

This aspect of the tipping point was very straightforward. As soon as the war broke out, all sides entered into a military confrontation.

Fierce fighting was seen on many fronts from the early moments of the war involving Tigray, Amhara, Eritrea and federal forces (Istratii, 2021; Niekerk, 2023; Plaut, 2021; Ploch Blancard, 2020; Pohjonen, 2022). The military nature of the change in the situation ('regime change') replaced the previous status quo. Responding to violence with violence caused a domino effect that reinforced the new status quo with each military offense (Lee, 2015).

Limited reversibility

It could be assumed that the tipping point was reversed with the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on 2 November 2022. However, the months prior to the signing of the CoH agreement saw a lot of violence and heavy fighting on all fronts. Not a lot seemed to point towards the possibility of lasting peace, until the actual mediation process started on 25 October 2022.

The limited character of reversibility of the new situation that emerged over the course of two years of war can also be observed. On multiple occasions, the different sides claimed to be open to peaceful resolution, however, their actions contradicted this position. When the Ethiopian government announced a unilateral ceasefire in June 2021, it was clear that it would not last long, if at all (Eritrea Focus; Oslo Analytica, 2022). Neither did the temporary ceasefire between March and August 2022 suggest that the war would be over anytime soon. This was particularly due to the ongoing tension and back-and-forth accusations between the TPLF and the Ethiopian government. Even the vision of a peace process was contested. In addition, this period saw the large mobilisation of Eritrean forces and ongoing clashes between the EDF and TDF. Eritrean forces have not fully left all of Tigray at the time of writing. Western Tigray is still occupied and not under the control of the Tigray regional government.

Inspired by Stocker's adaptation of visualisation displaying a critical transition (2024), the following figure aims to adapt it in light of the current chapter.

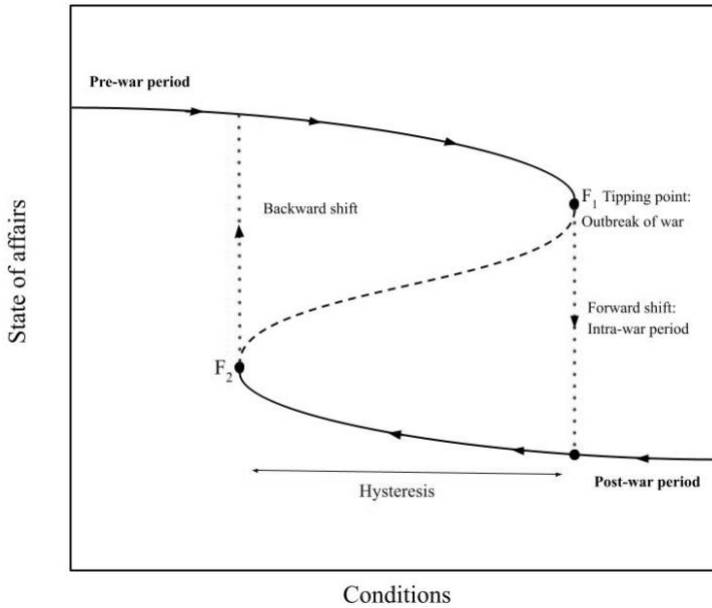


Figure 2.2. Critical transition of the alternative regime after the outbreak of Tigray war

(Adapted by Stocker (2024) from Scheffer *et al.*, 2012)

The pre-war period, which was characterised by a set of incremental processes leading up to the tipping point, was seen as a stable state that was about to change. As soon as the war broke out, the situation tipped, and this forward shift led to the new regime (situation) through a series of positive feedback mechanism, including the participation of the Eritrean military forces; the killing, destruction and looting of assets, which destroyed the economic and social fabric; the participation of other international actors in the war; and the military mobilisation of the participants in the war. The effects of the war could not be reversed completely by the mere signing of the CoH Agreement.

At the time of writing this chapter, it is difficult to predict whether conditions will be able to return to the original state by tipping over and backward shifts. The conditions discussed in this chapter include:

- Mistrust between political actors

- Militarisation throughout the region
- Large scale loss of lives and collective trauma
- Economic and social destruction of livelihoods
- Ethnic identity as source of political instability

As the damages of the war are far-reaching and devastating, the hysteresis (distance between F1 and F2 in Figure 2.2) seems to be long. It will require further research to understand what needs to be done, what steps are necessary for getting to F2 and whether this is desirable. Tsing (2005) finds that a ‘point of friction’ not only slows things down, but also speeds them up. A tipping point offers a vital force in the debate about new proposals for transformation (Tuin & Verhoeff, 2022).

Conclusion: ‘Game over’ is the new normal

The main objective of this chapter was to look at the critical transitions that occurred during the two-year Tigray war, while applying the theory of tipping points, to identify major changes in the situation that took place in Tigray and Ethiopia in the context of the Tigray war.

Departing from the premise of Clausewitz (1976), that a war does not break out without history, the study identified and examined events that led to the outbreak of the Tigray war. These events related to the period between 2018 and November 2020, during which Ethiopia witnessed some important developments.

In January 2018, President Isayas called “Game over” against the TPLF and Tigray people. In Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister of Ethiopia and soon after signed a controversial peace agreement with the Eritrean President Isayas Afwerki. This period is recognised as one of the ‘stable states’ that was about to change. The threshold (tipping point) was reached when mounting tensions between the Tigray regional government and the Ethiopian federal government reached a climax in the outbreak of the war in November 2020.

This chapter also provided a detailed analysis of the events that shaped the course of the war in Tigray. The outbreak of war caused qualitative change to the regime which preceded it. No one was able to predict how far-reaching and devastating the consequences of the

outbreak would be. The war was characterised by widespread violence, massacres, displacement, and human rights abuses of grave nature.

Shortly after the onset of the conflict, the war assumed regional and international ramifications. Ethiopian, Eritrean, Amhara, and Somali forces were actively engaged in direct combat and assaults on civilian populations. Each of the different factions deliberately participated in military offences against the opposing side.

Reaching the point of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in 2022 did not conclude the war. When Eritrean forces left, their trucks had victorious signs on them reading: “Game over, Woyane”. This can be read as a clear warning to the people of Tigray that, as far as the Eritrean leadership is concerned, the war is not over yet.

This chapter finds 10 critical points that can be regarded as markers of the period of the war in Tigray:

- January 2018: President Isayas declares “Game over” to Tigray
- July 2018: Peace Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia
- 4 November 2020: Declaration of a law enforcement operation
- June 2021: Success of Operation Alula Abanega
- July 2021: Operation Tigray Mothers and Sunrise
- December 2021: Tigray forces halt offensive
- June 2022: Mediation starts
- August 2022: Coalition offensive resumes
- November 2022: Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
- 2023: Eritrean forces leave Tigray with a sign “Game over” and “This is what we [Eritreans] do”

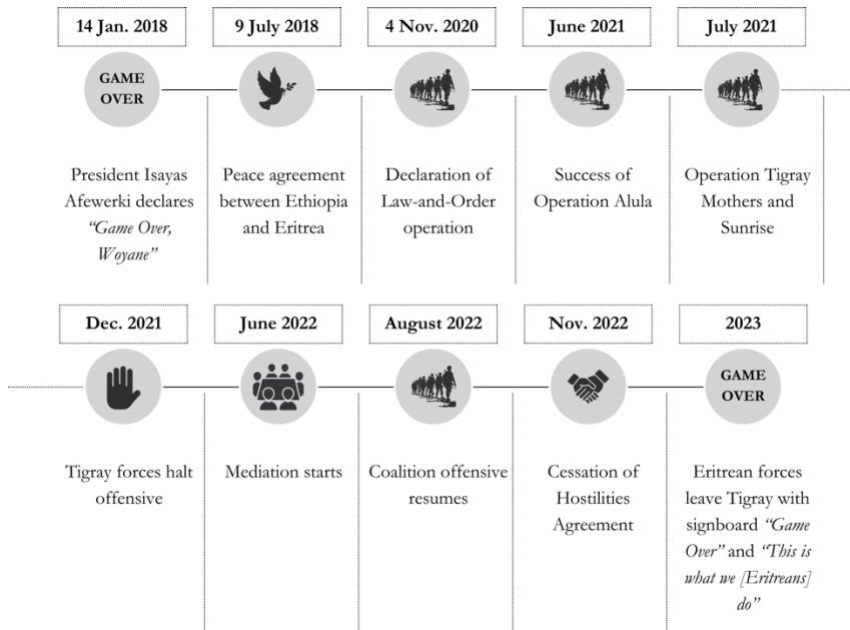


Figure 2.3. Timeline of tipping points in the Tigray War

The period after the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement has, for now, created a new state of stability, which is qualitatively different from the period prior to the war. The war itself that took hundreds of thousands of lives and caused devastating destruction in the Tigray region. The reverberations of the war are not over and it certainly has created a new situation with limited reversibility to the pre-war situation. In this new situation, the threat of "Game over" will hang over Tigray with some permanency.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the panel of experts from various relevant disciplines who verified the originality of audio used as part of the data for this chapter. We appreciate our interviewees and focus group discussion participants. We are grateful for the double peer review team for their comments. We thank the Research Network Globalisation, Accessibility, Innovation and Care (GAIC) for the discussions on the topic of this chapter. The authors thank Joëlle Stocker for the figures prepared for this chapter.

Authors' contributions

Kristína Melicherová is a PhD researcher at Tilburg University. She is the principal researcher and author of this chapter. This chapter was produced based on her independently conducted research as part of her PhD programme. She prepared the research approach and conducted data collection and analysis. She prepared the theoretical framework for this chapter. Melicherová prepared the first draft and carried out the revisions of subsequent drafts that were prepared. Prof. Dr Mirjam Van Reisen advised on the analytical framework of the chapter, authored specific sections regarding the timeline of events prior to the war, and revised the final version. Daniel Tesfa is a PhD researcher of the GAIC Research Network, an academic staff at Aksum University in the School of journalism and contributed interpretations from Tigrinya phrases used for this chapter. The interpretation included: translation, explanation of meaning, verification of source material, investigating the veracity of source material, keeping record of all source materials.

Ethical clearance

This research was carried out under ethical clearance obtained from Tilburg University Identification code: REDC 2020.139 titled “Cultural Dimensions of Meaning-making and Agenda-setting”. This chapter should be read in conjunction with the ‘Note on content and editorial decisions’ (Book 1).

References

- Abai, M. (2021). War in Tigray and Crimes of International Law. *Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture*.
- Addis, A. K., Asongu, S., Zuping, Z., Addis, H. K., & Shifaw, E. (2020). The recent political situation in Ethiopia and rapprochement with Eritrea. *African Security Review*, 29(2), 105–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2020.1783333>
- Alex T. [@alex_temelso]. (2023, January 20). This is EDF (Aradom) leaving Tigray after the defeat of TPLF with our motto Game Over [Tweet]. X. https://x.com/alex_temelso/status/1616422065715961860
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalians Meditations*. Stanford University Press.
- Burke, J. (2018, July 8). “These changes are unprecedented”: how Abiy is upending Ethiopian politics charisma and energy. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/08/abiy-ahmed-upending-ethiopian-politics>
- Clausewitz, C. Von. (1976). *On War* (M. Howard & P. Paret (eds.)). Princeton University Press.
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. (1948).
- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. (1951). United Nations General Assembly. <https://www.unhcr.org/5d9ed32b4>
- D’Costa, B. (2022). Tigray’s Complex Emergency, Expulsions and the Aspirations of the Responsibility to Protect. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 14(1), 5–11. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1875-984X-14010004>
- Dahir, A. L. (2018). For the first time in decades, there are no Ethiopian journalists in prison. *Quartz*. <https://qz.com/africa/1494561/ethiopia-has-no-jailed-journalists-in-2018-the-first-since-2004>
- EEPA (2020-2022) Situation Report on the Horn of Africa. SR number: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 18, 21, 29, 31, 32, 39, 44, 46, 53, 55, 60, 65, 89, 118, 161, 164, 168, 171, 172, 173, 176, 184, 186, 187, 189, 194, 197, 199, 203, 213, 229, 253, 256, 258, 263, 266, 272, 286, 299, 301, 302, 303, . EEPA. Brussels. https://www.eepa.be/?page_id=4237
- Eri-TV, Eritrea (Official). (2018, January 14). *ERi-TV: Local Media Interview With President Isaias Afwerki, January 14, 2018* [video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHSuYgzEW48&t=13s>
- Eritrea Focus, & Oslo Analytica. (2021). *The Tigray War & Regional Implications* (Volume 1). https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The_Tigray_War_and_Regional_Implications_Volume_1%0Ahttps://eritreahub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Tigray-War-and-Regional-Implications-Volume-1.pdf
- Eritrea Focus, & Oslo Analytica. (2022). *The Tigray War & Regional Implications* (Volume 2). https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The_Tigray_War_and_Regional_Implications_Volume_1%0Ahttps://eritreahub.org/wp-

- content/uploads/2021/07/The-Tigray-War-and-Regional-Implications-Volume-1.pdf
- Ethiopia Observer. (2018). *Ethiopia-Eritrea border restrictions tighten*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/naid/110007029668/%5Cnpapers2://publication/uuid/C8C23361-942A-48CE-B177-E86CBCF45A8E>
- Fana Television. (2018a, April 13). *ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር ዶ/ር አብይ አህመድ በመቼለ ያደረጉት ንግግር* [video]. https://youtu.be/JuzC1JkZVYc?si=fv6NFXBydrIE8_k
- Fana Television. (2018b, December 11). *የፍትህ ሰቆቃ - በኢትዮጵያ ሲፈጸሙ በነበሩ የሰብዓዊ መብት ጥሰቶች ዙሪያ ተሰራ ደካመንተሪ* [video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuGKmcIcKGT8>
- Fisher, J. (2022). #HandsoffEthiopia: ‘Partiality’, Polarization and Ethiopia’s Tigray Conflict. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 14(1), 28–32. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1875-984X-14010007>
- Fry, D. P. (2012). Life Without War. *Science*, 362(6083), 879–884.
- Geb, S. E. & Tesfa, D. (2024). Weaponising the media: Exploring the role of Ethiopian national media in the Tigray War. In: Van Reisen, M. & Mawere, M. (eds.) *Tigray. The Hysteresis of War*, Book 1. Langaa, Bamenda.
- Geneva Conventions. (1949). *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949. Article 2. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36d2.html>
- Gladwell, M. (2000). *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Haapanen, L., & Manninen, V. J. E. (2023). Etic and emic data production methods in the study of journalistic work practices: A systematic literature review. *Journalism*, 24(2), 418–435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211016997>
- Human Rights Watch. (2019a). Ethiopia: Abiy’s First Year as Prime Minister, Review of Freedom of Assembly Freedom of Assembly. *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/02/ethiopia-abiy-first-year-prime-minister-review-freedom-assembly>
- Human Rights Watch. (2019b). Ethiopia: Growing Uncertainty Marks Abiy’s First Year in Power. *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/02/ethiopia-growing-uncertainty-marks-abiy-first-year-power>
- iIMAGE eTHIOPIA. (2018, April 13). *Ethiopian Prime Minister | PM Abiy Ahmed speech in Mekelle* [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPkZiaMgkTE>
- Ingber, S. (2018, September 11). Ethiopia-Eritrea border reopens, after 20 years After War And Bad Blood. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/11/646643157/ethiopia-eritrea-border-reopens-20-years-after-war-and-bad-blood>

- Ismael, I. (2018). The game is over. *Awate*. <https://awate.com/the-game-is-over/>
- Istratii, R. (2021). On the Conflict in Tigray. *Public Orthodoxy*. https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/35272/1/On%20the%20Conflict%20in%20Tigray_Public%20Orthodoxy.pdf
- Jima, A. O. (2021). Vicious circle of Ethiopian politics: Prospects and challenges of current political reform. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.1893908>
- Jobbagy, Z. (2009). Establishing a theoretical framework to discuss war in terms of causality. *Academic and Applied Research in Military and Public Management Science*, 8(4), 575–583. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272093710_Establishing_a_theoretical_framework_to_discuss_war_in_terms_of_causality
- Kidanu, G. & Van Reisen, M. (2024). Bodies for battle fields: Systematic use of rape as a weapon of war in Tigray. In: Van Reisen, M. & Mawere, M. (eds.) *Tigray. The Hysteresis of War*, Book 1. Langaa, Bamenda.
- Kidanu, G. & Tefera, A.H. (2024). The turning points towards the unequal protection of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia: From protection to abduction. In: Van Reisen, M. & Mawere, M. (eds.) *Tigray. The Hysteresis of War*, Book 1. Langaa, Bamenda.
- Kallen, H. M. (1939). Of War and Peace. *Social Research*, 6(3), 361–391. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40981682>
- Levy, J. S. (1998). The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace. *Annual Review Of Political Science*, 1, 139–165. <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.139>
- Matshanda, N. T. (2022). Ethiopia’s civil wars: Postcolonial modernity and the violence of contested national belonging. *Nations and Nationalism*, 28(4), 1282–1295. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12835>
- Milkoreit, M. (2022). Social tipping points everywhere?—Patterns and risks of overuse. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 14(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.813>
- Milkoreit, M., Hodbod, J., Baggio, J., Benessaiah, K., Calderón-Contreras, R., Donges, J. F., Mathias, J. D., Rocha, J. C., Schoon, M., & Werners, S. E. (2018). Defining tipping points for social-ecological systems scholarship - An interdisciplinary literature review. *Environmental Research Letters*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aaaa75>
- Most, B. A., & Starr, H. (1983). Conceptualizing “War”: Consequences for Theory and Research. *Source: The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 27(1), 137–159. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/173845>
- Mumbere, B. D. (2018). Ethiopia PM pledges to reform security sector and revisit repressive laws. *Africa News*. <https://www.africanews.com/2018/04/15/ethiopia-pm-pledges-to-reform-security-sector-and-revisit-repressive-laws/>
- Niekerk, P. Van. (2023). Ethiopia’s Tigray war and the ‘big lie’ behind the century-defining 600,000 civilian deaths. *Daily Maverick*.

- <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-02-22-ethiopias-tigray-war-and-the-big-lie-behind-the-century-defining-600000-civilian-deaths/>
- Onoko, S. (2018). Ethiopia releases high profile political prisoners. *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-releases-high-profile-political-prisoners/a-42590273>
- Pellet, P. (2021). Understanding the 2020-2021 Tigray Conflict in Ethiopia – Background, Root Causes, and Consequences. *Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade*. <https://hiiu.hu/en/understanding-the-2020-2021-tigray-conflict-in-ethiopia-background-root-causes-and-consequences/>
- Pichon, E. (2022). Ethiopia : War in Tigray Background and state of play. *EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BR I\(2022\)739244](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BR I(2022)739244)
- Pilling, D. Schipani, A. (2023, January 15) War in Tigray may have killed 600,000 people, peace mediator says. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/2f385e95-0899-403a-9e3b-ed8c24adf4e7>
- Plaut, M. (2021). The Tigray Famine: Lessons from 1984–85. *RUSI Journal*, 166(4), 22–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2021.1981630>
- Plaut, M., & Vaughan, S. (2023). *Understanding Ethiopia's Tigray War*. Hurst & Company.
- Ploch Blancard, L. (2020). The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia. *Congressional Research Service*. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/te10058>
- Pohjonen, M. (2022). An epistemic proxy war? Popular communication, epistemic contestations and violent conflict in Ethiopia. *Popular Communication*, 20(3), 236–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2022.2074998>
- Prosecutor vs. Tadić, Case No IT-94-1-AR72 (1995)*.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2007). Research Methods for Business Students. *Pearson*.
- Scheffer, M., Carpenter, S. R., Lenton, T. M., Bascompte, J., Brock, W., Dakos, V., Van De Koppel, J., Van De Leemput, I. A., Levin, S. A., Van Nes, E. H., Pascual, M., & Vandermeer, J. (2012). Anticipating critical transitions. *Science*, 338(6105), 344–348. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1225244>
- Schipani, A., & Pilling, D. (2021). Ethiopia: war in Tigray threatens to end Abiy's dream of unity. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/8f18a8bf-0999-43e6-9636-3581a8a2c249>
- Shaban, A. R. A. (2019). Eritrea shuts all borders with Ethiopia – unilaterally. *Africa News*. <https://www.africanews.com/2019/04/23/eritrea-shuts-all-borders-with-ethiopia-unilaterally/>
- Stocker, J. (2024). Resilience conceptualised through transformation: A framework for interdisciplinary application. In: Van Reisen, M.,

- Medhanyie, A.A. & Mawere, M. (eds.) *Tigray. War in a Digital Black Hole*, Book 3. Langaa, Bamenda.
- Tsing, A. L. (2005). *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press.
- Tuin, I. van der, & Verhoeff, N. (2022). *Critical Concepts for Creative Humanities*. The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (1948). United Nations. <https://doi.org/10.1163/138819009x12589762582745>
- Van Der Dennen, J. M. G. (1980). On War: Concepts, Definitions, Research Data - A Short Literature Review and Bibliography. *UNESCO Yearbook on Peace and Conflict Studies*, 128–189.
- Van Nes, E. H., Arani, B. M. S., Staal, A., van der Bolt, B., Flores, B. M., Bathiany, S., & Scheffer, M. (2016). What Do You Mean, ‘Tipping Point’? *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 31(12), 902–904. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2016.09.011>
- Yethiopia News. (2018, June 15). ሊያገለግሉንና ሊያጨርሱን ለተዘጋጁት የቀን ጅቦች ዕድል ልንሰጣቸው አይገባም ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር ይክተር አብይ [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byuH_kjQSzE