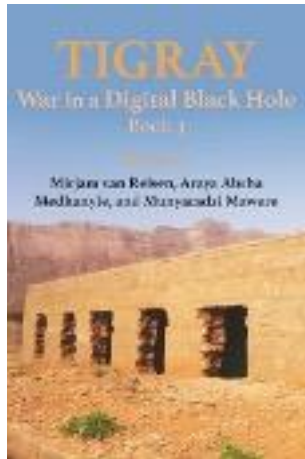


Note on Content and Editorial Decisions

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Note on Content and Editorial Decisions in: Tigray. War in a Digital Black Hole. Book 3.

From the book series:
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Note on Content and Editorial Decisions

Mirjam Van Reisen, Araya Abrha Medbanyie & Munyaradzi Mawere

πάντα ῥεῖ

Everything flows (Heraclitus)

The research presented in the three books, ‘Tigray’. ‘The Hysteresis of War’ (Book 1), ‘The Panarchy of War’ (Book 2) and ‘War in a Digital Black Hole’ (Book 3) (2024) is the result of a five-year interdisciplinary research programme, carried out from 2020 to 2024.

The research approach entailed an emphasis on ethnography, on research carried out in real life situations and on the ground. The purpose was to build up a systematic knowledge base that can be studied, corroborated, corrected and improved.

It is very difficult to write on the topic of war. It is personal, it is sensitive, it is hurtful and painful, it is emotional, and there are many contrasting views on the situation. In addition, the siege and communication blockade and Internet shutdown during the war created a digital black hole in Tigray. Therefore, there is an urgent need to document perspectives from within Tigray that are accessible to outside audiences. This research is an attempt to contribute to this.

To develop an in-depth understanding of the situation, there is a need to build trust, to engage, and to develop an in-depth understanding on the situation in real life, there is a need to have access, be present, be in the situation, speak the language, and be part of the culture. All of these are necessary for understanding and all of these give a particular viewpoint on the situation.

Ethnography

This research used ethnography, as it allows us to be immersed in a situation, to participate in it for a moment, to reside in it for a short time, while also perceiving it as a ‘stranger’, an ‘outsider’, and to reflect on it. In-depth interviews are often used in ethnography to deduce understanding and meaning from a small description of a situation.

This may also include small sample groups, autoethnography and long interview methodology. Interviews allow the definition of a situation through the eyes of the participants.

This research should not be read as the one truth on the war in Tigray. It seeks to promote dialogue and ensure the participation of Tigrayans as an important stakeholder in the peace-building process, which hopefully continues to move forward. There are many contrasting viewpoints in a war, and we have only been able to capture insights from different angles. We have tried to bring the voice of the communities who have suffered so much in this war and have a stake in the future, which will be established on the shattered pieces of the war. We encourage everyone who is interested in the war to debate the content, and we motivate each reader to consider what it says and to feel free to disagree. We do not have a claim on a final truth.

We request the reader to make a distinction between the contribution of ethnography to the understanding of the war, which allows us greater freedom to document what was experienced in the war, what perceptions were there, what rationales were seen, and what causalities were entertained. This offers a particular scientific genre that allows us to explore new viewpoints and to document perspectives that have remained hidden and can be uncovered in this way.

We want to insist that for any legal determination, additional tools should be employed. In this book, Tefera provides a legal argument, but none of the other chapters in the three books should be read as legal arguments or as facts presented for that purpose.

While we would like to ask that the sentiments and feelings of the people sharing these harrowing accounts, which were collected first hand, be respected. We recognise there may be elements documented in a certain way, requiring further corroboration with other sources. We invite you to engage in a productive exchange to strengthen a common understanding where possible.

Translations

The translations used in this research concern:

- Spoken conversations (interviews, focus group participants, fieldwork visits)
- Written text
- Media material, TV, videos
- Other

The spoken conversations were transcribed and translated under the guidance of the main researcher. For editorial purposes, small changes were made to make the translations more comprehensible to the reader. In doing so, care was taken to capture the spirit of the original spoken word and cognisant of the fact that a translation, if done literally, word-for-word, cannot achieve this.

Other material was translated under the responsibility of the main researchers, but they were asked to use a panel of judges for translation in some cases. The editorial team had access to the outcome of the review by the panel of judges.

There may always be some discussion on interpretation and translation between languages. We encourage debate on the meaning of what is presented, we do not claim that the selected representation is necessarily the only one, or even the best one. It was the interpretation of what was understood and available to all of us, when we published the book.

Language editing

The researchers presented in the books are not born in areas in which English is a first language. We have published in English to share the results of our work. We have edited the chapters for understanding and easier reading, however, we have not polished the chapters to become something else. The editing takes into account the way of expressing in English by the authors.

In translating from Tigrinya or Amharic to English, many variants are possible. For instance, Aksum can be spelt as ‘Aksum’ or Axum’. We have tried to create coherence across all of the chapters and books. There is no linguistic reasoning supporting the decisions.

For references to names, in Ethiopia and Eritrea, generally the first name is used as the main name, so for instance President Isayas Afwerki is referred as President Isayas. There are also different spellings of the names available. The editors have chosen a coherent use of the name, but no linguistic rule was used to make the decision.

Sources and use of proverbs

The Tigrinya proverbs presented at the top of each chapter are not provided for their literal meaning. They are presented to offer a figurative association with the situation, allowing the reader some freedom to reflect on values, norms, fears and emotions from the place where these originate. Proverbs often have a long history and have moved and transformed across times and places and languages and should not be read as a direct commentary on the situation at hand. The translation from Tigrinya to English may also not be perfect.

There are two sources for the proverbs used in this research. The First is the article by Filip Busau (2020) *Comparative Analysis of Some Tigrinya Proverbs*, Proverbium 37. These are written in Tigrinya, the language spoken north and south of the Mereb in the highlands of Tigray and Eritrea. The article draws upon the work of the author on the topics of birth and death in Tigrinya proverbs. The translations are by the author with alterations where it was deemed necessary by Daniel Tesfa, B. G. Kahsay, and Gebru Kidanu.

The other source is the work of Tsigereda Teklu, Asmelash Weldemariam and Asmerom Gebreslassie, published by the Ethiopian Languages Academy under the then Ministry of Culture and Spots, published by Artistic Publishing in 1993 (GC).

Names and references

With regards to names used in this topic, the following procedure was followed. In Tigrinya, people usually have three names, the name of the grandfather, father and the given name. The references in this book use the reference name chosen by the author.

All the participants and sources have been anonymised and deidentified. This was necessary, to ensure the safety of all participants.

This research uses references to Tigrinya and Amharic sources, which are written in original script.

Use and re-use of data and verification of data

For any use or re-use of any of the data and arguments presented in this research, we want to insist that it is the task and responsibility of anyone who wishes to (re-)use the data to understand the perspective from which the data is presented here and to seek triangulation with other sources on sensitive issues that may be contested.

We have been careful to verify the sources and participants. For future understanding and research, we believe it is important to document this data. However, we are aware that it is possible that viewpoints or facts may be disputed and we invite anyone to respectfully come forward with any grievances to help improve, correct or change what is presented and the interpretation of it.

The media material was presented for verification to a panel of judges. The judges were selected for their ability to understand the material and the context of this material being produced. In this way, the originality of speeches and other expressions was traced and verified. Where in on-line productions alterations were made by the publishers of the content, this has been identified. The author and editors have a database of material that was verified and used for this publication.

The editors are responsible for the content presented in these three books. We would like to receive any comments.

Symbols, expressions and generalisation

The use of symbols and expressions in any part of this ethnography are not in any instance presented as a generalised statement to judge, accuse or demonise a person, a group of persons, or a people.

Ethical considerations

The research ethics applied to this research adhere to the principles of: (i) authenticity; (ii) veracity; (iii) diversity; (iv) inclusiveness; (v) (self-)reflection; (vi) responsibility; (vii) providing credit to all who contributed; (viii) avoid claiming the work of others or exploiting contributions of others; (ix) ensure that there is no plagiarism (x) open dialogue; (ix) allow critical reflection; (x) reliability; (xi) respect for others; and (xii) operate with cultural awareness.

The research was also guided by the principles of (i) informed consent and ongoing consent; (ii) do no harm; (iii) protect the privacy of participants by keeping personal information confidential; (iv) providing comprehensive information on the purpose of the research to participants; (v) voluntary participation of all participants; (vi) accurate reporting; (vi) transparency of disclosure of conflict of interests; (vii) treatment of all participants with respect and dignity; (viii) open communication; (ix) minimise suffering, avoid (re)traumatisation and offer referral and support; (x) personal and sensitive data-protection; (xi) adherence to the legal frameworks in the place where research is carried out; (xii) adherence to international norms and standards; (xiii) clear documentation of all procedures; and (xiv) reproducibility within the research scope and approach. The research should also be feasible and realistic in scope within the given timeframe and be realistic in its ambition.

Each part of this research was subjected to double blind peer review, the ethical committee of the Research Network GAIC, the ethical board of Tilburg University and Mekelle University, and, in specific instance, boards, as provided in each chapter.

Peer review

Many of the researchers are members of the Research Network Globalisation, Accessibility, Innovation and Care (GAIC). Many of them are in peer-groups and discussed their work in the peer-groups, and presented their work in the on-line meetings. In this way, they were able to receive valuable comments on the studies performed. These also served to provide mutual support and encouragement.

We thank everyone who took the trouble to provide proposals for inclusion in the books. We regret there were some proposals that did not make it to final publications. The research team consisted of senior and junior researchers, and this may be clear from the work presented. The point of departure was that learning to do research is by doing, and by publishing and receiving comments. We invite anyone to provide comments to improve any work presented here.

The criteria for publishing was: (i) relevance of the topic to the research project; (ii) clarity on the methodology (iii) transparency on data obtained and used and on the process of their analysis; (iv) ability to improve the drafts based on comments received within given timelines; (v) ability to present and discuss the content with peers; (vi) editorial fit with the overall content of the three books and (vii) prove of authenticity of the contributions of all of the author(s). Every chapter is accompanied by an explanation of the contributions of each author to the chapter.

The double-blind peer-review was an anonymous review process. The authors of the chapters did not know who their reviewers were. The reviewers did not know who the authors were. The reviewers were asked to provide their opinion on the article in a form that was sent to them.

The double-peer reviewers also made comments in the text of the chapter, as comments and suggestions to improve the chapters and clarify the language. Their work is gratefully acknowledged. It provided an important step to select the chapters for publication.

All drafts of all the chapters have been saved in a database and are versionalised. The final decision to publish was with the editors.

Referencing

The references are presented at the end of each chapter. The references to other chapters in the book are separately referenced, for easy findability, and to allow the chapters to be read in a stand-alone way.

Time references

Ethiopia uses the Ethiopian Calendar (EC), which is identified in the text with EC in the specific cases that this calendar is used. Most of the years follow the Gregorian Calendar (GC). If no abbreviation is provided the GC calendar is used.

Warning about traumatic content

Finally, the material presented in these three books may be hard to read. We have tried to balance honesty about what we heard on the situation, with what can be presented to a reader. Some of the elements we encountered were simply unimaginable. We have tried to be truthful, but also sensitive. The work was guided by Van Reisen et al., (2023), which sets out a methodology of an ethnographic research with exposure to trauma.

We encourage the reader to take care of your health and mental health and well-being and to seek support if that is needed. We thank you for picking up this book and for your interest.

Figures

The figures in the books were converted to black and white to fit with formatting requirements. In some cases, this may make them less easy to read. The original pictures, in colour, can be found at the following link: https://raee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Figures_Tigray.-War-in-a-Digital-Black-Hole-Volume-3-1.pdf

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This chapter is available at: <https://raec.eu/tigray-war-in-a-digital-black-hole/>