Unraveling the Persistence of Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: Examining Causes

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ABSTRACT

To solve the country's long-standing political, socio-economic, and ethnic problems - including ethnic issues - the current Ethiopian government introduced ethnic federalism. However, ethnic disputes and tensions have emerged in many parts of the country. According to studies, there are conflicts and tensions all over the country. Conflicts between ethnic groups have not diminished but have even intensified. The primary theoretical framework for examining ethnic disputes in this paper is complexity theory. However, there are also other identity theories such as instrumentalism and primordialism. While previous studies have mainly focused on ethnic violence in post-1995 Ethiopia, the question of why ethnic conflict persists in the country has not been addressed. Ethnic-instrumentalist theories, social constructivism, and primordialism alone are not able to fully grasp the problem of Ethiopia. To fill this gap, the author has undertaken a thoroughly analysis of the reasons for the ethnic conflict in Ethiopia and its persistent nature. The authors believe that there is no single reason that is responsible for the persistent occurrence of racial conflict. Instead, it is a complex system of state and human interaction, such as the framework of federalism, the mobilization of elites, political rivalry, and historical narratives that separate different ethnic groups.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been fewer interstate conflicts but more intrastate conflicts, especially those involving ethnic groups- (Esteban *et al.*, 2012). Political unrest and violence have been widespread in many emerging economies in Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. These events were mostly triggered by inter-ethnic conflicts and separatist movements. East Africa is the most conflict-ridden region, and the Horn of Africa has the highest intra-state wars (Ikhane, 2021). Ethiopia is one of the nations where ethnic conflicts are fought and is no exception to this rule.

Ethiopia is home to more than 115 million people, making it Africa's second most populous nation (Dadi, 2022). The country has a great diversity of languages, cultures, and religions, with around 80 ethnic groups (Eresso, 2021). The country is struggling with a brutal war and an ongoing ethnic struggle. The conflict-ridden ethnic federalism since 1991 has shaped our perception of these ethnic clashes in the country (Yusuf, 2019). After the fall of the Soviet Derg military government in 1991, Ethiopia was rebuilt along ethnic lines by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (Kefale *et al.*, 2021). Against this backdrop, political authority was formally transferred to ethnic-focused federal organizations and ethnic parties, primarily the Oromo Prosperity Party (PP) and the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) (Yusuf, 2019). With the drafting of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution in 1995, federalism focused on ethnic identity was introduced after a five-year transition period.

After introducing ethnic federalism, discussions focused on its importance in promoting peace, reducing tensions, and promoting diversity. On the one hand, ethnic federalism recognized the power of ethnic identities and communities and the right to self-governance. However, despite their long coexistence and recognition as owners of their ethnic homeland, some ethnic groups today enjoy a significant advantage due to the nation's ethnic-based federalism. As a result, tensions between the different ethnic groups have increased. According to Temesgen (2015), ethnic tensions and violence have increased because certain groups exclude others to gain exclusive access to local resources such as land.

The increase in ethnic conflicts was also significantly influenced by the politicization and mobilization of ethnicity by the political elites. As a result, ethnic conflicts have occurred in several parts of the country, especially after 1995, including at public universities. Many parents have concerns about sending their children to public institutions in regional governments where their ethnic group is underrepresented because of the frequent ethnic clashes and bloodshed. In the 2018/19 academic year, many students left universities; some suffered injuries and even died, and some universities had to be temporarily closed (Adamu, 2019).

The current Prime Minister (PM), Abiy Ahmed, was appointed chairman of the ruling EPRDF and PM of the nation following the resignation of former PM Haile Mariam Desalegn in April 2018. Without the participation of the TPLF, the coalition parties of the EPRDF merged to form the Prosperity Party (PP) at the end of 2019 (Kefale *et al.*, 2021). Many believed the country would move towards a much brighter future in the first years of

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Abiy's government due to the party's political reforms. However, things have not changed in the country, which has descended into open bloodshed and ethnic conflict (Yusuf, 2019).

Ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia are the subject of numerous research papers and journal articles. However, they don't address the reasons for the persistence of ethnic tensions in different parts of the country. Consequently, based on the currently available literature, this study seeks to advance knowledge of the causes of the continuation of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia by carefully examining historical and contemporary events. This paper aims to identify why ethnic conflicts have persisted in Ethiopia, particularly since 1995.

METHODOLOGY

The research design chosen in this thesis was qualitative. A qualitative research approach was chosen since the conceptual concerns under investigation require extensive qualitative data and discussion. This paper mostly used secondary materials including books, journals, research papers, and reports from specific organizations. The author used this thesis's systematic review research method, a methodological approach to collecting and compiling current printed and electronic literature sources (Bowen, 2009). As a result, the author used secondary data sources such as books, working and policy papers, conference papers, academic journal articles, organizational websites, web articles, papers, master's theses and dissertations, and occasional papers, briefings, and information materials. Finally, the researcher uses thematic analysis to examine the collected material. This method allows the researcher to create themes or meaning-based patterns from the qualitative data and interpret them qualitatively (Terry & Nikki, 2021).

Conceptual & Theoretical Framework
Ethnicity and Ethnic Group

The definitions of ethnicity and ethnic group vary among scholars and are imprecise. While some researchers view ethnicity as a fixed identity that never changes, others see it as a malleable cultural construct (Byman, 2002). the term "ethnicity" encompasses "tribes, races, ethnicities, and castes" and, according to Horowitz, "easily includes groupings distinguished by skin color, language, and religion" (Horowitz, 1985). Ethnicity is a sense of identity that has grown over time and binds people together based on shared characteristics and customs such as language, historical background, way of life, and sometimes even religion.

Therefore, a person's general sense of identification and belonging to a specific social group is based on shared cultural, historical, linguistic, or genealogical characteristics, which are their ethnicity. It's a social construct that divides people into groups based on shared characteristics and life experiences. Various aspects of ethnicity, such as language, religion, traditions, customs, values, and beliefs, can be taken into account. It affects how people engage in social, political, and economic spheres and how they perceive themselves and relate to others.

A group of people who describe themselves as ethnic is defined by others or by themselves as having a shared sense of kinship and group distinctiveness; this belief is often reinforced by shared psychological affiliation, culture, language, religion, tribe, history, heritage, and possibly race (Taras & Ganguly, 2010; Rudolph, 2003). Similarly, Horowitz (1985) described an ethnic group as a group of people bound together by a common name, a shared sense of belonging to a particular place, solidarity, shared historical experiences, and a shared belief in common ancestry.

An ethnic group is, therefore, a group of people who belong to a specific ethnic group. It is a social group with historical, linguistic and cultural characteristics but still retains its identity. An ethnic group can be identified by nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, or location. Their behavior, customs, and social structure often distinguish them from other communities. Ethnic groups can differ in size, cohesion, and degree of organization. Their influence on politics, social dynamics, societal interactions, and the development of individual and collective identities is considerable.

Ethnic Conflict

According to Wolff (2006), a conflict arises when goals or interests are incompatible. Conflicts of this kind can occur based on ethnicity. Wolff (2006) also states that an ethnic conflict can be defined as any group conflict in which a side defines their ethnicity to further their goals and interests, or in which a party uses ethnicity to express dissatisfaction. Furthermore, a disagreement is only considered ethnic if the parties to the conflict primarily have different ethnic identities and group affiliations. Consequently, ethnic identity or differences are the main points of contention in ethnic conflicts (Cordell & Wolff, 2011; Kaufman, 2011).

Conflicts, tensions, and violent or non-violent clashes between different ethnic groups in Ethiopia are referred to as ethnic conflicts. Ethnic identity conflicts occur when individuals or organizations identify as members of a specific ethnic group and disagree with others due to shared interests, unresolved grievances, or perceived injustice. The reasons for ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia include political marginalization, land conflicts, perceived or actual historical injustices, competition for resources, and cultural differences. Inter-group violence, discrimination, social exclusion, resettlement, and a deterioration of social cohesion are common manifestations of these conflicts. A coordinated approach is needed to address the root causes of ethnic conflict and promote inclusive governance, discourse, and reconciliation, as ethnic conflict poses a serious threat to Ethiopia's stability, unity, and economy.

Federalism

The first attempt to define federalism was made by Wheare (1946) in his article Federal Government. Federalism is the coordination and independence of local, state, and federal governments within a given territory. Nevertheless, different scholars have defined federalism differently over time. Federalism is a system of governance in which powers are divided between national and local governments (Thisen, 2003). However, the power distribution between the different levels of government is difficult as it raises issues of cooperation, conflict, unity, diversity, and dependency. Federalism is a political structure in which government functions are divided between the national and local levels, with each level of government performing a portion of the functions for which it is ultimately responsible (Volden, 2004).

In the literature, federalism is defined as the constitutionally regulated division of powers among the various levels of government. As a rule, there are two levels: that of the states, provinces, or regions and that of the federal government, the nation, or the center. However, a federal system may occasionally allow for a threefold division of powers by providing for complicated forms of overlapping linguistic and geographical federalism, as in Belgium, or by recognizing the constitutional powers of local authorities, as in the case of South Africa. Federalism is, therefore, a system of government in which responsibility is shared between the federal government and several constituent states. States have different organizational structures for their federal systems. Some are based on territory, while others are determined by identification or other factors. In Ethiopia, for example, a federal state structure was introduced in 1995, using ethnicity as a criterion for forming regional governments. Therefore, Ethiopian federalism" is referred to as "ethnic federalism."

To summarize, federalism is a system of governance in which power is divided between the federal government, state governments, and local governments. Multiple levels of government are established with different powers and responsibilities to recognize independence and sovereignty. In a federal system, local government and responsibility for healthcare, education, and law enforcement fall under the purview of regional or state governments. On the other hand, it is at the national level where the federal government usually deals with foreign policy, defense, and currency matters. Federalism balances strong central power and regional self-governance, allowing for greater representativeness, diversity, and local decision-making within a single political framework.

Theoretical Framework
Primordialism

Premonitoryism assumes that ethnicity and ethnic identity are fundamentally "biological" or "natural" phenomena that have existed for hundreds or thousands of years (Taras & Ganguly, 2010). It's a trait that is difficult to adapt if not permanently fixed (Kaufman, 2011), and

there is a high likelihood that negative confrontations will always occur.

In primordialism, ethnic identification refers to a subjective sense of shared identity derived from objective cultural norms (Taras & Ganguly, 2010). A group of people who share the following six pillars of ethnic identity is referred to by Smith (1986) as an ethnic group (community) (French ethnie). A familiar name or collective identity, a shared myth of ancestry, origin, and location, particular aspects of a common culture (usually language or religion), a shared historical memory linking successive generations, a sense of attachment to a specific territory, and a shared sense of identity and solidarity with other group members are some examples. In comparison, an ethnic group is a biologically self-sufficient people who communicate and interact through shared cultural values. This group includes people who can identify themselves and are recognized by others (Barth, 1969).

In summary, primordialism emphasizes the importance of ancestral links such as ethnicity and historical identities and sheds light on the current situation in Ethiopia. According to the primitivists, the main cause of unrest is deeply rooted, intrinsic, and unchanging intergenerational identities. The idea of primitivism explains the severity of Ethiopia's wars, which stem from territorial claims, historical grudges, and ethnic rivalries. It emphasizes individuals' and groups' intense emotional and cultural attachment to their ethnic or regional identity, which can lead to persistent animosity between different groups and a sense of injustice and marginalization.

Instrumentalism

According to instrumentalist theory, ethnicity is neither useful nor intrinsic to human nature; rather, it is a façade for deeper political and economic goals. According to Taras and Ganguly (2010), ethnic identity is seen by instrumentalists as "a tool used by individuals, groups or elites to achieve a larger, usually material, goal" rather than something primordial. In their quest for dominance, ethnic elites exploit and emphasize ethnic differences through politics, aggressive crisis mobilization, hate speech, and terror (Oberschall, 2007).

Horowitz (1998) claims that the leading causes of ethnic strife are self-serving, cunning leaders or ethnic entrepreneurs who trick their followers (Kaufman, 2011) to further their interests or those of their group. The "greed" approach also represents the economic factors that lead to ethnic conflict. The struggle between elites for significant rents from natural resources is reflected in the concept of "greed" (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002). As Kaufman (2011) pointed out, instrumentalists also claim that the tendency to increase economic resources is typically the driving force behind ethnic conflict in many places in Africa, including the study case.

According to the instrumentalist perspective, political elites and ethnic entrepreneurs can use ethnicity, including politically charged ethnicity, as a weapon or tool to organize the members of their ethnic groups to achieve

both political and economic gains (Taras & Ganguly, 2010). To summarize, the School of Instrumentalism provides a framework for understanding the current conflict situation in Ethiopia. Instrumentalism assumes that political elites deliberately sow discord and ethnic identities to further their goals and maintain power. According to the instrumentalism theory, political actors in Ethiopia use ethnic differences to consolidate their positions, gain support, and acquire resources. The instrumentalist perspective illustrates how conflict arises from power, self-interest, and political calculation.

Complexity Theory

Societies are empirically complex social systems with emergent properties such as self-organizing behavior and the ability to adapt (Byrne, 1998). Social systems are extraordinarily dynamic, non-linear, and emergent, making it challenging to determine universal laws or norms that would allow us to predict the behavior of a particular civilization or community (Cilliers, 2002).

Based on complexity theory, the findings of this study assume that social interactions such as class, gender, ethnicity, and age form groups in the world and that these groups are systems consisting of several interdependent components that influence each other. According to this view, conflicts arise from the interactions between multiple systems when there are discrepancies between them. Consequently, it helps highlight the problems, challenges, and ultimate goals in each system and the overall conflict (Cilliers, 1998). Complexity also allows us to understand how violent conflicts develop in social systems, how to stop them before they arise, resolve them when they arise, and make social systems more resilient (Coning, 2020).

In the case of ethnic conflicts, complexity theory is a valuable tool. Indeed, ethnic conflicts differ from other types of conflict in the influence of invisible factors such as identity, culture, grievances, and mistrust of how the different systems involved in the conflict interact. Therefore, the idea of complexity provides a helpful framework for understanding the current conflict situations in Ethiopia. Complexity theory postulates that disagreements arise from linear cause-effect relationships and the interactions and feedback loops of multiple interconnected components. A complex web of interrelated variables, including ethnic differences, historical grudges, political power struggles, socio-economic inequalities, and regional aspirations, determines Ethiopian conflicts. Complexity theory highlights the importance of understanding conflict's non-linear and unpredictable nature and developing thorough but adaptive conflict resolution techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Ethnic Federalism and Ethnic Party Politics
Twenty years of military rule and civil war in Ethiopia ended in 1991 with the fall of the TPLF-led EPRDF regime (Kefale *et al.*, 2021; Mengistu, 2015). To divide the country along ethnolinguistic lines, the dictatorship established nine regional states: Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benshangul/Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, Gambela and Harari People Regional States (Art. 47 FDRE Constitution, 1995).

Many academics agree that Ethiopian federalism has disadvantages. Although it recognizes the autonomy and self-governance of ethnic communities, it also exacerbates regional ethnic conflicts (Mengistu, 2015). According to Kefale *et al.* (2021), most collective rights in ethnic federalism are represented by ethnicity. Thanks to ethnic federalism, ethnic groups can organize themselves and use ethnic politics as the primary tool for power politics and state organization (Mengistu, 2015). Over the last thirty years, Ethiopia's federal structure based on ethnicity has indeed fostered ethnic sentiments and intensified ethnic animosities (Adamu, 2019).

In the 1995 Constitution of the FDRE, p. 13, Article 39 guarantees the full right to self-determination, including secession, for all Ethiopian nations, nationalities, and peoples. According to Chekol (2015), interethnic violence is encouraged by the unrestricted possibility to secede from the union as it gives ethnic groups more self-confidence and authority to fight other groups. For example, according to Hamza (2021), the TPLF is trying to establish an independent state to use the "secession clause" and has declared Tigray a de facto state.

Apart from the secession clause, as the old territorial institutions disintegrate, more and more ethnic groups are trying to establish their autonomous territorial units at regional and sub-regional levels based on the full right to self-governance guaranteed in the Constitution (Kefale *et al.*, 2021). Recently, the federal government granted regional autonomy to the regional states of Sidama and Southwest Ethiopia (Ethiopian News Agency, 2021; Ethiopian Government Portal, 2021).

Ethnic violence and attacks were the result of the mobilization and organization of members of the respective ethnic groups by the political elites to strengthen their power and control over resources. For example, the Sidama Liberation Movement, the youth organizations known as Ejeto, and other political elites incited members of their ethnic groups. Fifty-three people lost their lives, and 54 others were injured as a result of the inter-ethnic conflict (Kiruga, 2019). The country's political parties are mostly structured according to ethnic identity, in addition to the ethnic restructuring of the state.

An ethnically oriented party seeks to represent these communities and draws the majority of its support from one or more specific ethnic groupings (Horowitz, 1985). The EPRDF, led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), was formed in 1998 and is governed by a coalition of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the South Ethiopian People's Democratic Front, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the TPLF (Kefale *et al.*, 2021; Yusuf, 2019). The Prosperity Party (PP) and the EPRDF merged in 2019. Kefale *et al.* (2021) state that the PP is a national

or nationwide party prioritizing Ethiopian nationalism over ethnicity. Nevertheless, it is organized and led based on ethnicity. The party is divided into several ethnic factions that compete with each other for power in the government.

In addition, the number of political parties running in the 2021 parliamentary elections shows how strongly the ethnic groups are represented. Of the fifty-five political parties running for office, nine are national or statewide, while the other forty-six are based on ethnic identity (National Election Board of Ethiopia, 2021). According to Dowd & Driessen (2008), ethnic parties are distinguished by the people they stand for rather than their ideologies. Rather than emphasizing broad national issues, the parties advocate for the policies of their ethnic communities. It is difficult for Ethiopians to unite and fight for their rights as they see themselves as different rather than the same because of their ethnicity.

But they can also act as catalysts for interethnic conflict and violence. Political parties driven by ethnic motivations seriously degrade democracy (Dowd & Driessen, 2008). Different ethnic groups employ various tactics to start or intensify interethnic conflict. Among the examples are appeals to ethnic voters, demands made to the government by ethnic groups, emphasis on the prominence of ethnic chauvinist organizations within each group, and the development and exacerbation of ethnic divisions (Horowitz, 1985).

In conclusion, it can be said that ethnic federalism and ethnic party politics essentially determine the conflict dynamics in Ethiopia. Since the introduction of ethnic federalism, national unity has not always been prioritized over ethnic identity. Instead, each ethnic region is granted a high degree of autonomy. Despite the goal of redressing past grievances and promoting self-determination, competition among ethnic areas for land, resources, and power has exacerbated ethnic conflicts. Ethnic party politics, in which political parties fight for resources and influence based on common ancestry, has also deepened these differences. This has exacerbated inter-group disputes and made it more difficult for a coherent national identity to emerge.

Politicization and Elite Mobilization of Ethnicity

As the ethnic consciousness of the nation grows, identities are formed, reshaped, and mobilized for specific political, social, and economic goals (Chekol, 2015). More than 80 ethnic groups are recognized in various government documents and academic publications, although the exact number of ethnic groups in the country is unknown. However, the House of Federation (HF) claims to represent only 76 ethnic groups. The HF states that "with the recognition of more ethnic groups, the representation of ethnic groups has improved. In the last five years, the number of ethnic groups has increased from 67 to 76".

Ethnic identities develop, as the growth of ethnic groups shows. Examples include Kucha, Dorze, Mello, Uba Gezo, and other organized ethnic identities (Mazengia,

2020). The "Kemant" and the "Amhara" are in an ethnic conflict due to recent cases of politicized ethnicity, and the "ethnic identity of the 'Kemant' is increasingly recognized (Belay, 2014). The two groups have entered a complex relationship by invoking a common language, culture, religion, and ideals (Mazengia, 2020).

The politicization of ethnicity can influence the behavior of society and benefit political elites, as it is generally the most sensitive and emotional issue (Chekol, 2015). The struggle for supremacy and power among Ethiopian elites is strongly influenced by ethnicity (Eresso, 2021), exacerbating conflicts between ethnic groups (Abebe, 2016). This was recently the case when the Amhara and Afar regions were incited by the TPLF-led Tigray region against the federal government by promoting a victim mentality among its citizens (Tigray TV, November 26, 2020; November 21, 2019). Following an attack by TPLF Special Forces on the Ethiopian Defense Forces Northern Command in November 2020, fighting spread to the nearby areas of Amhara and Afar (Gavin, 2021).

As a result of the radicalization and mobilization of various ethnic groups by the political elites, ethnic conflicts have repeatedly erupted over the years. Especially after 1995, the nation faced severe problems due to the elites' greedy pursuit of wealth and political domination. As a result, the politicization of ethnicity and elite mobilization are significant factors contributing to Ethiopia's conflict dynamics. Ethnic elites have consolidated their authority, united their ethnic communities, and used ethnicity to gain political influence. Thus, political loyalty and identity are now mainly determined by ethnicity, which overrides overall national goals and creates a divisive political climate. The politically motivated exploitation of ethnicity has exacerbated inter-group rivalry, fueled mistrust and resentment, and increased inter-group tensions. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to promote a political culture that prioritizes common values, goals, and inclusive governance for the different ethnic groups.

Historical and State-Building Narratives

How the past is represented and understood greatly influences today's goals and policies. The history study is important and has been linked to conflict, rivalries, and the mobilization of groups in Ethiopia. Political elites can achieve the organization and justification of political power through historical narratives. Antagonism and conflict arise when historical narratives are distorted to the advantage of one group while harming others by labeling them as "oppressed" and "oppressors" (Chekol, 2015).

Nevertheless, the elites have different views on history, although Ethiopia is one of the few nations with a long history (Hailu, 2022). The emergence of today's Ethiopian state or empire is the central theme of the contested historical narrative. Emperor Menelik II expanded his empire in the 1800s by annexing small kingdoms and villages in the country's west, east, and south. These kingdoms include Arsi-Oromo, Gurage, Wolayta, Kaffa, Hararghe, and Sidama (Abebe, 2016).

In the current political debate in Ethiopia about Emperor Menelik's military expansion, however, three competing narratives or theses are put forward (Abebe, 2016). The first thesis is that of national and colonial oppression: the colonial theory is supported by the most radical ethno-nationalist (radical left) groups, including certain Oromo elites and Eritreans. They see secession as the only viable option and portray the Ethiopian state as a colonizer. They consider the incorporation of tiny kingdoms and communities as colonial, as in establishing European empires (Kebede, 2015;Gashaw, 1993). Other elites, including the TPLF and Emperor Menelik II, promoted national oppression. They sought "self-determination" as a remedy because they believed it spoke for the oppressed Amhara ethnic minority against other ethnic groups (Abebe, 2016). The TPLF government, mainly targeting Amhara ethnic identity, effectively used this narrative of oppressors and oppressed as part of its divide-and-rule policy for almost thirty years (Kebede, 2015; Gashaw, 1993).

The institutionalization and legalization of the oppressor narrative by the TPLF are also evident in the Constitution of the FDRE. The preamble states that the best way to fulfill our common destiny is to right historical wrongs and advance our shared goals (FDRE Constitution, 1995). This myth has been further politicized and used by various ethnic parties and political elites as a tool to pursue their own goals. Ethnically motivated attacks target the Amhara ethnic identity across the country because of a narrative of victimization and oppression (Eresso, 2021).

Secondly, the reunification thesis states that Emperor Menelik's territorial expansions throughout the country were not colonial endeavors but reflected a reunification of the former territory. Thirdly, the expansion thesis states that the emperor's aim in expanding his empire was to create a nation composed of elites with multi-ethnic backgrounds, a national language, national symbols, and a solid loyalty to the imperial throne (Kebede, 2015).

The political elites disagree on many aspects of Ethiopia's past, and these disputes continue to this day. The university-level history course "History of Ethiopia and the Horn" was released by the Ethiopian Ministry of Science and Higher Education in 2019. Conflicts about the course's content among ethnic elites prevented the course from being included in the curriculum. According to Arebo (2020), history is the only academic discipline in Ethiopia that has provoked discussion and criticism.

To summarize, historical narratives and state formation played an essential role in shaping the course of the Ethiopian conflicts. Rivalries and tensions between ethnic groups were fueled by their different representations of history, often motivated by anger and a sense of injustice. State-building initiatives that foreground the dominant ethnic groups and marginalize others have reinforced these myths and fostered a climate of exclusion and prejudice. Political instability and constant wars result from the struggle for resources and representation caused by this power imbalance. To solve these problems, inclusive nation-building projects that honor and respect the Ethiopian people's diverse historical experiences and aspirations must be implemented.

Ethnic Security Dilemma

Rose (2000) points out that when there is a significant security issue, ethnic conflict is more likely to occur. Authoritarian leaders, anarchy, the fall of a government or regime change, hostile neighbors, the vulnerability of a minority group, changes in the distribution of political power between groups, changes in access to or control over economic resources, etc., are some examples of environments or conditions that can trigger fear and lead to security dilemmas (Wolf, 2006; Crawford, 1998). A variety of factors can explain the ethnic security problem in Ethiopia.

Despite the long history of state-building, the country has no democratic government. There are few or no democratic institutions to protect the rights of the people, and an authoritarian dictatorship, an absolute monarchy, and the military rule the country. Ethnic groups defend themselves against their neighbors by arming themselves when threatened. The security institutions have been divided into ethnic groups since 1991. Each ethnic regional state has similar military equipment to the Ethiopian National Defense Army but with its own paramilitary (semi-military) groups (militias, regular police, and special police forces, called "Liyu hyel" in Amharic) (Defense Web, 2018). The national security of the nation is, therefore, in danger. The TPLF was better equipped for almost thirty years than the country's armed forces. The attack on the Ethiopian National Defense Force (Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), 2020) triggered the battle in northern Ethiopia.

In this security conflict, several actors attempt to organize and mobilize their ethnic community as a security tactic. In the words of Wolf (2006), "…ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs may make blatant ethnic appeals and attempt to outbid moderate politicians, thereby mobilizing members, polarizing society, and exacerbating intergroup dilemmas" (p. 74). To appeal to the feelings of members of their ethnic groups and the desire to ensure their safety, ethnic entrepreneurs and activists in social media and mainstream media use ethnic identity as a motivating factor.

In addition, Rose (2000) has found explanatory variables that illustrate how a severe security challenge increases the likelihood of conflict or war, citing Posen. First, it is assumed that when security is low or absent, an arms race occurs as countries seek to defend their interests militarily. Aemro (2016) also claims that the proliferation of small arms in Ethiopia is due to both self-defense and a lack of trust in the country's security services. Any robust and democratic security organization in the country cannot guarantee the population's security. Instead, throughout the EPRDF government (Van Veen, 2016) and currently under the government of Abiy Ahmed, the state security

institutions — which are dominated by a single ethnic group— - have been perceived as the "protectors" of the TPLF.

Since 2020, state security forces and ethnically motivated armed organizations have killed at least 1800 ethnic civilians, mostly Amharas, according to Eneyew (2022). In response to the growing security threat, the Amharas have become better organized and equipped to defend their security. Secondly, when one ethnic group gains political dominance over another, the likelihood of conflict or war increases. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, an Oromo, was elected to lead the country after the TPLF-led EPRDF regime, which lasted from 1991 to 2018, was overthrown in 2018. Oromo supremacy replaced Tigrayan control in the government. The Tigrayans perceive the loss of the TPLF's influence in Addis Ababa as a threat (Jeffrey, 2019). As a result, they began to strengthen their military, and on November 3, 2020, they formally declared war on the federal government's armed forces (Eneyew, 2022).

To summarize, the ethnic security problem has significantly increased tensions in Ethiopia. When ethnic groups compete with each other for resources and power, a vicious circle of mistrust, insecurity, and terror is created. As the government places great emphasis on ethnic identity and autonomy, tensions have increased, leading to deadly conflicts and political instability. Emotions have run high, and attempts to find a peaceful solution are hampered by the failure to address problems such as injustice, prejudice, and unresolved grievances. The core causes of the ethnic conflict must be addressed, and inclusive governance, equal resource allocation, and interethnic communication must be encouraged if Ethiopia is to see long-term peace and security.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic conflicts, displacement, bloodshed, and wars have plagued Ethiopia since the introduction of ethnic federalism in 1995. In Ethiopia, ethnic conflicts and their persistence are mostly due to a single factor. Instead, the following reasons contribute to ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia: (1) Ethnic federalism and party politics; ethnic division of government power and party politics have created prospects for ethnic entrepreneurs; (2) Politicization and mobilization of ethnicity Due to the structure of state institutions, it is easy for elites to politicize and mobilize ethnic identities for their own political and economic goals; (3) Historical and state-building narratives: disagreement among elites on how to explain this state-building process leads to conflict; and (4) the ethnic security dilemma: as a result of the mobilization of ethnic identities, each ethnic group sees the other as a security threat. Consequently, each ethnic group has begun to arm itself to defend the other ethnic group.

The ongoing ethnic conflicts have caused much damage to the nation, including economic destruction, psychological impact, loss of lives, and displacement. According to the author, no single cause exists for the ongoing racial conflicts. Instead, it is the complicated patterns of state and human interaction, such as the organizational framework of federalism, political rivalry, elite mobilization, historical narratives between ethnic groups, and ethnic division.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors propose the following recommendations based on the findings and critical analysis. First, the conclusion proposes institutional and legal reforms, including the establishment of a national commission to review and amend the constitution, the balancing of individual and group rights, and the replacement of ethnic-based federalism with geographic federalism. Secondly, the findings emphasize the importance of transitional justice and history in achieving national unity. It proposes the establishment of an impartial National Historical Truth Finding Commission composed of experts from various fields to investigate historical facts and make recommendations. It also emphasizes the need for history professionals to write and teach about history. Third, the findings advocate strengthening local peace building and linking it to national dialogue. It emphasizes the role of neighborhoods in maintaining peace and resolving disputes and recommends an independent national commission to lead the national dialogue, ensuring public participation and clear procedural norms. Fourth, the conclusion addresses the problem of elites using ethnicity for their own interests. It calls for the promotion of communication, common interests and consensus among elites to prevent polarization and ethnic conflict. The government is called upon to promote horizontal and vertical equality and to defend the rights of individuals and groups.

Finally, the authors emphasize the importance of reconciling ethnic diversity and national unity. They suggest creating inclusive institutions, overcoming racial boundaries and promoting inter-ethnic dialogue, reconciliation and equitable access to resources and representation. Implementing these recommendations can help Ethiopia overcome the challenges of ethnic conflict, ethnic federalism and ethnic party politics, leading to a more secure and prosperous future for the country.

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